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# CJR

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JOURNALISM  
REVIEW

JULY/AUGUST 2000  
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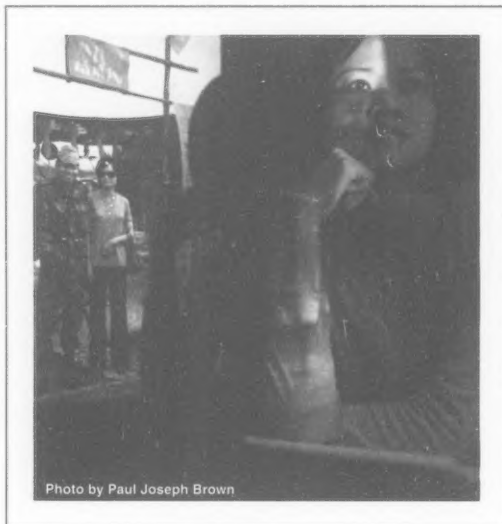
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# For Reporter Phuong Le, Covering the Vietnamese-American Experience Was the Story of a Lifetime. Her Own.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer reporter Phuong Le was only 3 years old when her family fled Vietnam. Saigon had fallen and, like many Vietnamese, her family journeyed to the United States to begin a new life. Now, 25 years later, Le retraced her family's steps to research this first-hand story of the Vietnamese-American experience.

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## WINNERS

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**Nest**

*(Under 100,000 circulation)*

**Saveur**

*(100,000 to 400,000 circulation)*

**The New Yorker**

*(400,000 to 1,000,000 circulation)*

**National Geographic**

*(Over 1,000,000 circulation)*

### PERSONAL SERVICE

**PC Computing**

### SPECIAL INTERESTS

**I.D. Magazine**

### REPORTING

**Vanity Fair**

### FEATURE WRITING

**Sports Illustrated**

### PROFILES

**Sports Illustrated**

### PUBLIC INTEREST

**The New Yorker**

### DESIGN

**Fast Company**

### PHOTOGRAPHY

**Vanity Fair**

### FICTION

**The New Yorker**

### ESSAYS

**The Sciences**

### REVIEWS and CRITICISM

**Esquire**

### GENERAL EXCELLENCE IN NEW MEDIA

**BusinessWeek Online**

## FINALISTS

### GENERAL EXCELLENCE:

Context • I.D. Magazine • Lingua Franca

Print • The Sciences

*(Under 100,000 circulation)*

Business 2.0 • National Geographic Adventure

Teacher Magazine • Texas Monthly

*(100,000 to 400,000 circulation)*

Fast Company • GQ • Marie Claire • The Source

*(400,000 to 1,000,000 circulation)*

Entertainment Weekly • Men's Health

Time • Vanity Fair

*(Over 1,000,000 circulation)*

### PERSONAL SERVICE:

Consumer Reports • Esquire

Redbook • SmartMoney

### SPECIAL INTERESTS:

Bon Appétit • National Geographic Traveler

The Oxford American • Saveur

### REPORTING:

Harper's Magazine • Human Rights Quarterly

The New Yorker (2 nominations)

### FEATURE WRITING:

Esquire • The New Yorker

Philadelphia Magazine • Spin

### PROFILES:

The Atlantic Monthly • Esquire

Philadelphia Magazine • Sports Illustrated

### PUBLIC INTEREST:

Governing • Harper's Magazine

Sports Illustrated • Texas Monthly

### DESIGN:

ESPN The Magazine

National Geographic Adventure • Nest • W

### PHOTOGRAPHY:

Harper's Bazaar • National Geographic

The New Yorker • Rolling Stone • W

### FICTION:

The Georgia Review • Harper's Magazine

The New Yorker • Zoetrope: All-Story

### ESSAYS:

Esquire • Forbes ASAP

House & Garden • The New Yorker

### REVIEWS AND CRITICISM:

The Nation • The New Yorker (2 nominations)

Premiere

### GENERAL EXCELLENCE IN NEW MEDIA:

Atlantic Unbound • SmartMoney.com

TheStandard.com • Zoetrope-stories.com



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"To assess the performance of journalism . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent" —From the founding editorial, 1961

JULY/AUGUST 2000

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# THE CONDÉ NAST PUBLICATIONS

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## THE NEW YORKER

ON WINNING

### 3 NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARDS

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#### GENERAL EXCELLENCE

Circulation 400,000-1,000,000

#### PUBLIC INTEREST

Richard Preston for "The Demon in the Freezer"

#### FICTION

Jhumpa Lahiri for "The Third and Final Continent"

George Saunders for "The Barber's Unhappiness"

Robert Stone for "Dominion"





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## LETTER FROM DAVID LAVENTHOL PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

### FORD, KNIGHT \$1 MILLION GRANTS

**G**ood news at CJR: The Knight and Ford Foundations each have given a \$1 million grant to the *Review*, largely to meet ongoing operating expenses. Both grants will be paid evenly over four years.

This remarkably generous support is a strong endorsement for maintaining multiple critical voices in a changing media world. And we appreciate the confidence in our ability to produce a high quality magazine.

Part of the Ford grant is targeted as support for Voices, our every-issue section that features regular columnists and a wide range of other opinion. We don't always agree with the Voices writers — that isn't the intention. We welcome the clash of ideas, which sometimes produces better ones.

### CJR AND THE J-SCHOOL

Both Don Hewitt (Counterpoint, Page 8) and Steven Brill (CJR, May/June 2000) have questioned the relationship between CJR and the Columbia Journalism School and potential conflicts of interest involved. Hewitt links the *Review* to the school's sponsoring of a breakfast about the movie *The Insider* at which Lowell Bergman spoke (CBS declined to send a representative). Brill thinks CJR should acknowledge that it has a conflict of interest because it raises funds from people it writes about.

From time to time the journalism school holds forums to discuss public issues. It raises funds to pay for them, mostly from businesses with an interest in media issues. One of these events is the First Amendment breakfast, which takes place several times a year and has become somewhat of an institution in New York. That is the event at which Bergman spoke. The *Review* has absolutely nothing to do with this event.

The *Review* is housed in the journalism building on the Columbia campus; by tradition the dean of the journalism school is also the publisher of the *Review*. But Dean Tom Goldstein changed that policy in order

to provide more focus on CJR. I report to the dean and, of course, he has influence over the magazine but otherwise our editorial and business operations are largely separate from the school. The *Review* has its own budget that includes salaries for six news professionals, free-lance fees, an administrative payment to the university, and a variety of other expenses.

The university expects us to balance that budget every year with circulation and advertising revenue and from grants. That is why the Knight and Ford grants are so important. They will enable us to achieve that balance assuming we do the right job in the marketplace.

The school has an extensive development effort which occasionally involves organizations that CJR is writing about. Since our operation is separate, we see no need to identify those gift givers, unless part of the gift is to CJR. We identify our donors on the masthead (page 6).

Then there is the more classic potential conflict: advertising. The organizations that purchase ads in CJR are frequently media companies that we write about. We maintain the same standards as any good news organization. Our editorial staff produces a magazine that is accurate and fair to the best of its ability. If an advertiser doesn't like a story and therefore chooses not to be in our magazine, we will live with it, although we would hope media companies would understand that in the long run criticism is good both for them and for the news business overall.

### NEW EXECUTIVE EDITOR

To insure that we are operating as effectively as possible, I have named Michael Hoyt executive editor, responsible under me for all editorial functions of CJR, with special emphasis on story development. Mike is a twelve-year veteran of CJR. In addition to editing, he also writes a column for the magazine and teaches in the journalism school. ■

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# VANITY FAIR

ON ITS TWO AWARDS FROM THE AMERICAN  
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## WINNER REPORTING

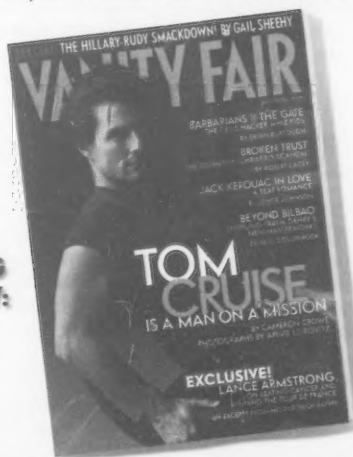
FOR ITS COVERAGE OF THE WAR IN KOSOVO:  
MADNESS VISIBLE, by Janine di Giovanni, and THE FORENSICS OF WAR, by Sebastian Junger

## WINNER PHOTOGRAPHY

FOR SETTING "NEW STANDARDS FOR MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPHY"



REPORTING  
AND PHOTOGRAPHY:



WHAT ELSE  
IS THERE TO SAY  
ABOUT A MAGAZINE?

Published by the Columbia University  
Graduate School of Journalism  
Dean: Tom Goldstein

**PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:**  
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## ON SHUTTING UP

The problems of "self-censorship" for reporters and editors are real ones, as I pointed out in a September article in *The Washington Monthly*.

But your articles fail to examine the reasons for self-censorship. Publishers, advertisers, editors have significant conflict of interests between the needs of the readers and the needs of the advertisers. For example, on the two most important consumer issues, buying a house and buying a car, almost all local newspapers have completely caved in. Classified advertising from real estate agents and car dealers is too important. They will not publish truth-telling articles such as "How to Sell Your Own House Without an Agent" or "How to Negotiate the Best Price When You Buy a New Car."

Those newspapers that have run such articles have been subjected to advertiser boycotts. They don't try anymore. Editors and reporters learn very quickly: it doesn't pay to bite the hand that feeds you. It's not worth it.

BLAKE FLEETWOOD  
New York, New York

## ALMS FOR THE NEWS

Geneva Overholser's column (CJR, May/June) praises Stan Tiner's suggestion that publishers should be induced to set aside a percentage portion of profits each year "for the operation of a superior newsroom." A sort of charity-begins-at-home approach.

I say it is a stinking idea. It identifies quality as a charitable exercise. It gives quality journalism the status of the nineteenth century concept of The White Man's Burden. Perhaps the best thing that may be said is that it puts the need for supporting quality as

a duty to perform while God is looking, or as Overholser suggests, because others are looking — a public relations gimmick.

But let's look with eyes open instead of pinched shut in prayer. Who will benefit from improved quality in the newsroom? Why, the publishers — or more exactly, the corporations that run newspapers (and TV and radio news, for all that), if one feels, as I do, that quality pays off.

This radical concept has been embraced by a few newspapers, and it has paid off for them. See *The New York Times*, *St. Petersburg Times*, *The (Portland) Oregonian*.

Furthermore, since the papers themselves would benefit from quality, the donations would not under current IRS regulations qualify as a charitable deduction. Even the IRS recognizes that taking something (Stan shows his wage-slave mentality by suggesting one-tenth of a percent) out of the 30 percent average profits (or is it 20 percent or is it 40 percent) — a figure almost all other industries envy — to improve the paper would be financially beneficial to the paper. But publishers, especially those kept by publicly held corporations, don't seem to accept this theory. So what CJR needs to do is the research that would

quantify the concept that quality results in good things like growth, lack of staff turnover (itself expensive) and higher profits which then can go to real charitable needs.

Since Overholser's column was in two parts, so is this letter. She wisely (one out of two is terrific in baseball) suggests that if newspaper profits, newshole size, salaries and other delicate matters were made public, publishers might change their ways. She may be right — after all, publishers are reluctant to beat up on editors because periodicals like CJR would bring them notoriety. So, let CJR start reporting on the economic facts of life. No matter that they are secrets closely held by the media companies. Good reporters like Overholser know how to get information some people don't want published.

And don't tell me you can't print this letter because it is too long. Increase your newshole!

MEL OPOOTOWSKY  
Riverside, California  
(Opotowsky retired as managing editor of *The Press-Enterprise*, Riverside, California, where he also served as ombudsman. Last year he was a Knight International Fellow.)

## A MOTHER'S ROLE

Every time the story is written on how I actually came to be publisher of *Times Mirror* in 1960 the myth is repeated over and over again that it was primarily due to my mother. This is completely in error.

At that time three outside directors and my father Norman Chandler comprised the executive committee of the board.



I was told *after* I was appointed publisher that in early 1960 the outside directors pointed out to Norman that they did not want him to continue to carry the title of publisher and chairman and c.e.o. of Times Mirror. If an acquisition program were to be seriously undertaken they felt it was too much for Norman since the acquisition field was entirely new to him and he would need to devote all his energies as c.e.o. to the new acquisition program. My mother, I was later told, was in favor of my appointment as publisher but the decision was forced on my father by the three outside directors. It was a question of "either you appoint Otis as publisher, Norman, or we are not going to be in favor of the acquisition program."

OTIS CHANDLER  
Oxnard, California

## MAIL CALL

I enjoyed Stu Bykofsky's Counterpoint piece (CJR, May/June) on the publication of reporters' e-mail addresses — mercenary tactics and all — but thought I might add another perspective.

Even with the ease of e-mail, it is oftentimes difficult to get our readership to speak up. Sometimes we run four consecutive issues (that's a month) without a single letter submitted, and that stings. Without the easy accessibility that Bykofsky criticized, our publication would receive approximately 75 percent fewer letters.

A two-way street sounds nice, but I would prefer my newspaper to be a four-way intersection.

Mr. Bykofsky, I wish I had your problem.

PAUL SMITH  
Editor, *The University News*  
University of Missouri  
Kansas City, Missouri

## HEWITT RESPONDS

Regarding your May/June Dart criticizing my journalistic ethics for sharing with a doctor friend of mine allegations about him sent to my attention at *60 Minutes* by an attorney named James Neal — allegations that subsequently found their way into print in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, and the *Columbia Journalism Review* — perhaps you might want to report some facts.

### FACT 1:

"Mr. Neal's continued unethical behavior . . . has left no option for this court but to disqualify him as plaintiff's counsel." [signed] Roland Barnes, Magistrate, Superior Court of Fulton County, Atlanta Judicial Circuit

### FACT 2:

To the editor, *San Jose Mercury News*:

"The Dr. Nezhat that we know is incapable of the things you have accused him of in your article." [signed] Thirty-six Nurses at Stanford Hospital

### FACT 3:

To the editor, *San Jose Mercury News*:

"You fell prey to the interests of those who have long waged an unsuccessful campaign against a man whose name has come to be synonymous with surgical excellence." [signed] Sunil Bhoyrul M.D. F.R.C.S., Chief Resident in Surgery, Stanford University School of Medicine

### FACT 4:

To the editor, *San Jose Mercury News*:

"It is important to note — and this fact was omitted from the story — that the primary source for allegations contained in the article are a lawyer who sued the Nezhat and in turn has been disqualified by the court in that matter and two gynecologists who compete directly for patients with the Nezhat." [signed]

Eugene Bauer, Vice president for Stanford University Medical Center.

In going after me you have, by implication, given credibility to a story that, almost in its entirety, lacks credibility.

And you question my journalistic ethics?

DON HEWITT  
Executive producer  
*60 Minutes*  
New York, New York

## SHADOWS ON THE SUN

A Dart in your May/June issue rightly criticized three major Canadian newspapers for agreeing to report without "reaction, comment, or criticism" a leaked "bombshell letter" to Reform party members by party leader Preston Manning.

But you also wrote, "Only *The Toronto Sun*, whose liberal leanings rendered it literally unapproachable, escaped with its journalistic virtue intact."

Liberal? Journalistic virtue? Even by middle-of-the-road U.S. political standards, it's rare to hear those phrases used to describe a tabloid that makes the *New York Post* look like *The Times* of London.

More likely, Manning passed up the *Sun* because he wanted to make a splash with three nationally circulated dailies, the *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*, and *Toronto Star*. The *Sun*, scrappy tabloid that it is, responded aggressively the way a tabloid is supposed to.

That's virtue enough for me.

HAL DAVIS  
Dayton Daily News  
Dayton, Ohio

## CORRECTION

In the March/April article on ombudsmen, the name of the reader's representative at *The Kansas City Star* was misspelled. She is Miriam Pepper, not Popper.

Think the  
environment  
isn't your  
beat?

1) food safety

2) power outages

3) traffic jams

Then  
you're not  
getting  
the full  
story.

Go online  
for facts and  
contacts.

ems.org

Environmental  
Media Services

# COUNTERPOINT

## INSIDER VIEWS THE INSIDER

BY DON HEWITT

In an effort *not* to contribute to the hype while the Lowell Bergman-Michael Mann-Eric Roth film *The Insider* was alive and kicking I opted not to participate in the seminar Tom Goldstein, the dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism (and Lowell Bergman's good friend) convened to talk about the film. Permit me now to respond to what turned out to be, to my eye and my ear, a second-rate adaptation of a first-rate Marie Brenner piece in *Vanity Fair*.

First and foremost, when a journalist and sometimes journalism professor (Lowell Bergman or any other) who professes to be dedicated to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth conspires with a screenwriter to concoct a movie about himself that portrays him, by name, saying things he never said and doing things he never did (like quitting over a principle as Mr. Pacino *did* but Mr. Bergman *didn't*) and is so comfortable with the fraudulent portrayal that he lends his presence to "hyping" the movie, that is not a journalist I would allow within a hundred miles of a newsroom or a teacher I would allow within a thousand miles of a journalism school.



Counterpoint provides an opportunity for those who disagree with what is published in CJR to express their point of view. Don Hewitt (left), executive producer of *60 Minutes*, is responding to Lowell Bergman's article "News with Fear and Favor" in the May/June issue of the magazine. Hewitt chose to use the letter as a text for a speech he gave to IRE, the investigative reporters' group, in New York on June 3. Bergman sent a reply to IRE. A modified version of his response is included here.

About Michael Mann, the man who co-wrote and produced what was touted as a film about CBS caving in to the threat of a lawsuit, can this be the same Michael Mann who admitted to the Directors Guild magazine that he himself had caved in to the threat of a lawsuit by that same tobacco company because, as he told the Directors Guild magazine (and this is a direct quote): "He (Wigand) was being sued by Brown & Williamson for breaching his confidentiality agreement" and "We could not be even seen as potential recipients of confidential information he was going to divulge or else we . . . would have been named in the suit." Unquote.

Isn't that exactly what Mann and Bergman accused CBS of? You bet it is! And that left Michael Mann, as he himself also said in that same magazine article, no choice but (and again I quote) "to guess" — guess — at (Wigand's) motivation for the pivotal moment in the story. As it turned out, that wasn't his only "guess," a lot of them wrong. So, allow me if you will, a guess of my own. I guess that had Michael Mann opted to tell the story straight — as Marie Brenner wrote it — and not gone off on flights of fancy, he might have gone off

with a couple of Oscars. About those flights of fancy: When Lowell Bergman told that Columbia J-School seminar that what his movie — as opposed to Marie Brenner's magazine article — dealt with was not the truth but a *higher* truth, it took John Darnton, the culture editor of *The New York Times*, to remind him that for journalists there is no such thing as "higher truth" or, for that matter, "lower truth." There is only "truth" and "untruth."

While a story about a reporter who really and truly quits his job to demonstrate his journalistic integrity (as the actor playing — playing — Lowell Bergman did) is a pretty good idea for a movie, the *real* Bergman *didn't* quit! Not only did he keep on working *for* (and getting a weekly paycheck *from*) the broadcast he skewered in the movie, he later had no qualms about continuing to work free-lance for the news organization he professed to be fed up with, and was not embarrassed to ask Mike Wallace to intercede on his behalf to get his job back after CBS decided they had had enough of him. And, while there is no reason why a movie should have to give even a passing nod to "the truth," journalists worth

being called journalists should and do. And a journalism school as prestigious as the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism should be above playing "flack" for a movie starring a Hollywood hotshot "playing" a "wannabe" hotshot reporter who just happens to be a close friend of the dean's.

Not content with sponsoring a seminar to plug his movie, The J-school at Columbia made available two full pages of its *Columbia Journalism Review* to Bergman to indulge himself in several ridiculous and untrue allegations: Number one was this — and I quote — "The movie does something you cannot do on network television; it raises the issue of corporate censorship and more importantly self-censorship."

Strange goings on from a guy who knows very well that that isn't true . . . because — before the full Wigand story ran — as it finally did — Lowell Bergman and Mike Wallace produced a *60 Minutes* story that reported just about everything there was to know about nicotine addiction without identifying Brown & Williamson's Jeffrey Wigand — an omission that Mike Wallace explained by sharing with his viewers that — quote — "We at *60 Minutes* . . . were dismayed that the management at CBS had seen fit to give into perceived threats of legal action against us by a tobacco industry giant."

Let me give you that again: Mike Wallace said on CBS's air (with CBS's concurrence) that "CBS management had seen fit to give in to perceived threats of legal action." How many news organizations do you know that would permit one of its own reporters to

tell the world that the company he works for had turned "chicken"? — not even over a real threat but over — as Wallace said on the air — a perceived threat?

And if only a movie can (in Bergman's exact words) "raise the issue of corporate censorship," doesn't he know that that's exactly what he and Mike were raising at that very moment on *60 Minutes*?

Here's another of Lowell's ridiculous contentions: That network news broadcasts have to pull back when it comes to reporting anything derogatory about events in which their network has a commercial interest. If that's true, how does he think Bob Simon and Michael Gavshon used CBS's *60 Minutes* to tell the world about the chicanery and the bribery that went into the awarding of The Winter Olympics to Nagano, Japan, at the same time CBS Sports was reaping millions from its arrangement with that same Olympic Committee to broadcast the events from Nagano?

If — as Bergman contends — television news steers clear of stories about institutions that are "powerful," can someone explain to me how Mike Wallace went on *60 Minutes* and took on one of *60 Minutes*'s biggest sponsors — the (I think it's fair to say) "powerful" Ford Motor Company with a devastating story about how unsafe the fuel tank was in the Ford Pinto and how irresponsible Ford was not to do something about it? How about Ed Bradley and Allen Maraynes using CBS's air to detail report after report of accidents resulting from unintended acceleration in cars that were at the time being advertised on CBS — a condition the car company denied — but, to their credit, did something about and

became a bigger and better car company for it.

And how — at the same time CBS Sports was carrying the Final Four basketball tourney — does Mr. Bergman suppose Lesley Stahl and Rome Hartman were able to go on CBS's *60 Minutes* and hold college basketball's feet to the fire about the behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing that basketball coaches were involved in with compa-

nies like Nike and Adidas . . . who were then and continue to be clients of CBS.

And, if *60 Minutes* steers clear of doing stories about what Bergman calls "powerful institutions" can someone please explain to me why *60 Minutes* is — has been — and continues to be persona non grata at the Pentagon . . . why government agencies, almost to a man, treat us like a pariah and would rather eat razor

blades than face a team from *60 Minutes*.

Because we're patsies?

Because we're afraid to offend?

Anyone who has watched *60 Minutes* — let alone worked for *60 Minutes* — knows that is foolishness and if a journalist who worked for *60 Minutes* for thirteen years doesn't know it — the editors of the *Columbia Journalism Review* should. ■

## LOWELL BERGMAN RESPONDS

Dealing with Don Hewitt means you have to keep your eye on the ball because he swiftly and deftly tries to change the subject and the facts. First, *The Insider* is not a documentary. But it is dead-on accurate when it comes to the issues as well as the emotional and philosophical themes that made this incident of corporate self-censorship important. Second, no personal attack can obfuscate the fact that Don Hewitt was not only willing to drop the interview, but at the same time to abandon a source who had put himself and his family at risk when he agreed to go on camera.

My consulting on *The Insider* was approved by CBS and by him. He just did not expect me to tell the truth to Michael Mann and Eric Roth, the screenwriter. They took what I told them, and their own independent research, and created *The Insider*. It is their movie.

Hewitt and Mike Wallace know that at the end of January 1996, I quit. The next day *The Wall Street Journal* published Wigand's deposition. Mike Wallace asked me to come back and I agreed because then and only then did they agree to put the story on the air. It is critical to remember that at this point,

as the movie accurately reports, there was virtually no risk to CBS and *60 Minutes*.

Right after the story ran (February 4, 1996), I re-negotiated my contract with CBS. That re-negotiation's first demand was removing me from the staff of *60 Minutes* because of Hewitt's behavior. I stayed on at CBS as a free-lance contractor reporting to the *Evening News* until the spring of 1999.

As for asking for my job back, Mike Wallace has conceded that I never asked him to do so. Finally, everyone at *60 Minutes* who lived through this period knows that Don Hewitt never fought for the story — as he now claims. In fact, "The Boss" buckled before the CBS general counsel with hardly a whimper. He has conveniently forgotten his own admission in the biographic *90 Minutes on 60 Minutes* produced by WNET.

Furthermore, Don Hewitt wants to forget the fact that the "censored" version of the story he refers to was then censored by him. It was Hewitt who excised any mention of the profits CBS executives would make upon the completion of the merger with Westinghouse (See *The New York Times* editorial, November 13, 1995). After the firestorm that erupted when Hewitt and Wallace endorsed the CBS decision on the front page of *The*

*New York Times* (November 9, 1995), Wallace realized his mistake and delivered the on-air apology Hewitt refers to. The next day, to his credit, Wallace acknowledged the "cave" (*Charlie Rose Show*, November 13, 1995). At that point Hewitt, however, expressed no regrets. In fact, he then conferred repeatedly and secretly with Brown & Williamson's public relations representative, John Scanlon, who engineered the smear campaign aimed at discrediting Jeffrey Wigand, the former tobacco executive. And Hewitt believed that smear.

Despite Hewitt's denial, network news censors itself and will rarely take on suppliers and advertisers. Those of us who gather the news know that when we venture into this territory — or when a "friend" of the executive producer is involved — we are betting our jobs and our careers. Hewitt's list, compared to the volume of stories that are aired, leaves no doubt that the exceptions prove the rule.

My goal was to make sure that the issues of censorship and self-censorship in network news got on the table once and for all to a mass audience. I believe that *The Insider* does that effectively and honestly. Let's hope that Hewitt's virulent reaction will amplify the filmmakers' achievement. ■

# CURRENTS

## IN REVIEW

### AP'S PULITZER

**T**he Associated Press's investigative story about American soldiers killing civilians in the Korean War was one of the most meticulously edited articles the AP has ever done. In fact, at least one of those involved thought the AP's top editors were stalling and didn't intend to run the piece at all during the seventeen-month period that the story was reported and edited. The effort won a Pulitzer. Then came the report that a key witness hadn't told the truth. It was a staggering blow, though the basic story appeared to hold up. The Pulitzer board affirmed the prize, but a little more journalistic credibility slipped away. Questions about the prize culture were renewed.

Still, we hope that neither prizes nor diligent reporters will be discouraged by the affair. For all the controversy, the Pulitzer and other prizes show the kind of journalism that is possible, setting aspirations that others are challenged by. And tough investigative reporting always has had high risks. The AP is to be commended for taking them. We need more investigative reporting, not less. And with it we need an even more meticulous editing process to insure that we are right in the end.

### SPOILING THE SURPRISE

**F**ox News features a logo that says "We Report; You Decide" but the fact is that we decide. We the media. When a group of publicity-seeking adventurers play out their million-dollar stunt on CBS's hot show, *Survivor*, the press rushes in to interview the characters and give intimate details of their lives and thoughts.

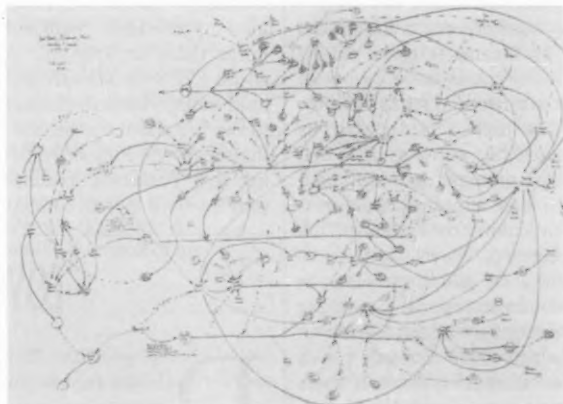
One detail they don't pursue: Who is the final survivor? (Even though the episodes are unfolding, the event is over and on tape.) Naming the survivor, of course, would spoil the story. We decided.

When ambitious and competitive news organizations reveal exit interviews that show who won an election even before many people have voted, we decide by a different logic. In this case, we reason, we're merely telling the public what all the insiders already know. True enough. But the larger truth is that reluctant voters now have another reason not to cast their ballots. Oh, well. It's only an election. It's not like we're revealing the outcome of a TV show.

### THE PRIVACY PROBLEM

**D**ay after day, the media furiously assaulted the South Miami neighborhood. Night after night, the evening news displayed the slightest new snippet of Elián González. Then suddenly, after seven months of relentless exposure, Elián vanished from the public eye.

The six-year-old clearly has more chance to grow up normally if he isn't facing cameras all day. And so his father's decision to go private while the case goes through the courts makes sense. Yet it is unfortunate that the only way to achieve privacy was to completely remove the subject from the scene. Imagine a world in which he didn't have to do that — a world in which the media restrained themselves to reasonably non-intrusive coverage except at times when great events are really occurring (such as when Elián was being taken by federal agents).



COURTESY OF PEROGI 2000 GALLERY

## THE INVESTIGATIVE ARTIST

**A**t the age of forty-eight, conceptual artist Mark Lombardi at last was receiving the critical acclaim he'd been working toward for years. His penchant for abstraction and obsessive detail had finally found its medium in large, hand-drawn charts of a subject typically seen as downright ugly: international financial and political scandal, from Whitewater to tax-evasion at the Vatican Bank. His piece at the "Greater New York" exhibit this spring at P.S.1 in Queens was a show-stopper, a wall-size chart of corruption that detailed nearly every person and institution mired in the BCCI money-laundering scandal of the 1980s.

Then, on March 22, Lombardi was found dead in his Brooklyn apartment, judged a suicide. In his obituary, *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith called him "an investigative reporter after the fact." Lombardi researched the complex connections scrupulously, reading tomes of political exposés, scouring newspapers for corroborating

articles, then cataloguing each implicated figure on index cards. Like a seasoned writer, he'd then bring overarching form to the material. He often consulted journalists in Houston, where he lived before coming to Brooklyn two years ago, and as Smith wrote, Lombardi "liked to say that his drawings were probably best understood by the reporters who had covered the scandals he diagrammed."

Lombardi's drawings present elegant loops and curves. Individuals and companies are featured in circles, red entries indicate major lawsuits, criminal indictments, or other legal actions, while broken lines are asset flows and solid lines are paths of influence. At the same time, the drawings are lyrical and airy, like "star maps," comments Christian Viveros-Fauné, co-director of Roebeling Hall, a Brooklyn gallery. "That's the magic of Mark's work. Then you get closer and it's a heavy duty conceptual punch."

— Carly Berwick

Berwick is an associate editor at ARTnews.

## BLASTING THE BOSS IN BOSTON

**R**eporters rely on whistle-blowers.

What happens when a reporter becomes one? You could ask Robin Washington of the *Boston Herald*, though he's no longer talking publicly about the odyssey he endured this spring. Still, it's a tale worth exploring.

On April 27, an *E&P Online* story detailed claims by newsroom employees at the *Herald* that the tabloid "censored stories to placate a major advertiser." The story said that Washington, the paper's consumer columnist, had been told to stop writing about the planned merger of Fleet Bank and BankBoston, New England's largest banks. Washington had written critically about the merger in three columns in early April, contending, among other things, that 700,000 bank customers would pay higher fees. *E&P* said further that sixty-eight *Herald* journalists had signed a petition to protest "the unethical influence of advertisers and business interests" over the *Herald*.

The day after that, Washington was widely quoted in *The Boston Globe*, which prominently covered the flap, and elsewhere. He said he had been told not to write more about the merger, and that he had been demoted to general-assignment reporter when he persisted.

*Herald* publisher Patrick Purcell issued a statement saying it was "ridiculous" to accuse the paper of being influenced by the bank. The context did not necessarily strengthen



Robin Washington

BOSTON HERALD

his case: the new bank, to be known as FleetBoston, figures to be a big advertiser; Fleet Bank holds a \$20 million mortgage on the *Herald* building; sources at the *Herald* say that Purcell is a personal friend of the top two execu-

tives at the new bank; and a Fleet spokesman acknowledged complaining twice to *Herald* editors about Washington's columns.

On Sunday, April 30, Washington was suspended indefinitely without pay. The Newspaper Guild filed a grievance and, on Tuesday, there was a demonstration outside the *Herald* building in support of Washington. The four-year *Herald* veteran is the only black news reporter at the paper and was president of the Boston Association of Black Journalists at the time. He's also Jewish. These connections helped rally support; consumer activists and readers also chimed in. Harvard Law School professor Charles Ogletree, a prominent scholar, agreed to advise Washington.

On May 5, the *Herald* backed down. After serving a two-week suspension, Washington was back on the job, writing, of all things, about the FleetBoston merger.

So what happened here, and what does it mean?

First of all, it's important to understand that the conflict started before it became public. According to several sources, the chronology goes like this: Washington was said to have been told by *Herald* editor Andrew Costello on April 11 that the FleetBoston

story had "run its course" after the three published articles. (Costello and Purcell did not return phone calls.) Washington kept pitching merger stories, however, and three more were shot down. He was beginning to irritate his editors.

They moved beyond irritation when the writer from *Editor & Publisher* called Costello and managing editor Andrew Gully on April 25, asking about staff complaints regarding coverage of the bank merger. The editors summoned Washington, who admitted complaining to a friend at *E&P*. He claimed that he did not do it to initiate a story. But the editors didn't buy that, and they didn't seem to appreciate finding themselves on the other end of a news story. *The Boston Phoenix* reported that Gully and Costello erupted into an "obsenity-laden tirade" that ended with Washington's demotion.

The son of an African-American father and a Jewish mother, Washington, forty-three, grew up in a Chicago home steeped in social activism. Vanessa Williams of *The Washington Post*, who has worked with Washington on the board of the National Association of Black Jour-

nalists, says he is someone "who thinks that if you believe in something and believe you're right, that's what is most important."

What about going public with those convictions even if it embarrasses your employees? Yawu Miller, who edits the *Bay State Banner* and used to work for Washington, argues that "when they took him off that beat, I don't think he had any choice. Whether or not he got his job back, at least he's on the record as saying that the reason he lost his job wasn't the quality of his writing."

Washington is well regarded at the *Herald*, but not everyone is sure he took the right course in going public. One critic argues that criticizing the paper was a dumb decision that "helped no one."

It certainly was a shame for the *Herald*, a worthy competitor to the larger *Globe* and a paper that has gone after lots of stories with more tenacity than its broadsheet rival. That includes the FleetBoston merger, the biggest recent consumer story in New England. Thanks to Washington's early coverage the *Herald* led the way on that story, at least for a while.

— Stephen J. Simurda  
Simurda writes often for *CJR*.

### LANGUAGE CORNER

## THEY'RE NOT GENERALS

**T**he story said a judge "at a minimum will request briefs from the Justice Department, state attorney generals and Microsoft." But when we start with one attorney general and add more, it isn't generals who increase, it's attorneys. That makes the correct plural "attorneys general." It comes out wrong pretty often, especially in speech (including that of attorneys general), and some dictionaries have knuckled under, telling us it's okay either way. It's not, any more than it is, say, with sergeants major or brothers-in-law. With all such, logic limits the choice of plurals to one.

— Evan Jenkins

A lot more about writing right is in Language Corner at *CJR's* Web site, [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).

# CURRENTS



THOMAS ADAME

Kelley Lynn, left, interviews Garentina Kraja, a writer from Pristina, as an Army Public Affairs officer looks on.

## KOSOVO ON A BUDGET

**K**elley Lynn spends his days as a beat reporter at the *Kentucky New Era*, in Hopkinsville, covering the nitty-gritty of county government. He also covers a second beat for the 15,500-circulation daily: Fort Campbell, a sprawling nearby Army base that is home to the 101st Airborne Division, a tradition-rich group whose soldiers fly into battle aboard helicopters. "I see how the soldiers train, how they live," Lynn says. "I see everything — except I don't see the end result, how they actually do their job." That changed this spring, when Lynn took the third airplane ride of his life (his first overseas), to Skopje, Macedonia. There he boarded a military bus to Kosovo and covered the troopers of the 101st as they patrolled the province as a part of Task Force Falcon. The only hitch? The Army paid his way.

Press ethicists tend to look askance at junkets. "A newspaper gives up some of its journalistic independence when it accepts these offers," says Bob Steele, director of the ethics program at the Poynter Institute.

But Lynn doesn't see it that way.

The trip was part of an Army program called Regional Media Trips to the Balkans, aimed at reporters for small media outlets. Lynn, thirty-one, was picked for the trip by Army planners. The only substantial cost to the *New Era* came from getting him to and from Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, where the trip began. Margaret McBride, an Army public affairs officer, says the program has sponsored nearly two dozen trips to the Balkans since 1996. McBride says the Army takes a hands-off approach. "We don't prep the soldiers and we don't prep the journalists. They can talk to anybody they want, about anything they want."

"My newspaper was able to cover a real-world deployment," Lynn says. "For our readers, seeing an overseas story by a reporter whose byline they know means something."

"I saw a part of the world, a culture, I never would have seen otherwise," he adds. "Once you are there, you aren't just a kid from Kentucky anymore."

— Wayne Svoboda  
Svoboda teaches at Columbia.

## PREVIEW

### A NATION, NOT A NICHE

**A**t the upcoming Republican and Democratic national conventions, CNN will be sending more than 400 people to provide extensive live coverage, while the Fox News Channel goes live several hours per night, and C-SPAN goes gavel-to-gavel. There will be new Internet Alleys for all the dot-coms covering the action. But — while NBC plans to have Tom Brokaw and Tim Russert anchor three hours per night of live coverage on MSNBC, the network's cable channel — the Big Three broadcast networks, sources say, may do even fewer hours in prime time than in 1996 (one hour per night, with two hours on the final acceptance-speech evening). Rather than interrupt pre-season football, ABC will squeeze convention coverage into halftime.

The migration of convention coverage — and a lot of live political talk — to cable and the Internet is a sign that we in the media are in danger of encouraging a politics that is a game for the political junkies. With voter participation at all-time lows, it cannot be good for democracy to have politics trending towards programming for the already interested.

Of the twenty-two primary debates and town hall meetings this campaign season, ten were sponsored or co-sponsored by CNN, and all but two were carried on cable. (The exceptions: ABC's *Nightline* and NBC's *Meet the Press*.) The problem is this: The audience for cable and the Internet is minuscule compared to the broadcast

networks, and even PBS (which promises extensive convention coverage) reaches far fewer viewers.

Broadcasters have an obligation to inform the general public, and it would be bracing to hear one of their owners say, "This thing only comes around once every four years. Let's cover the hell out of it, with all kinds of innovative reporting on the issues to get around the parties' attempts to turn it into a big photo op." Wild-eyed romanticism? With broadcast news losing so many viewers to cable and the Internet, maybe it's pragmatic.

— Jane Hall  
Hall is an assistant professor in the School of Communication at American University.

### CHEATWOOD WATCH

**K**ee an eye on your local CBS station. Will Joel Cheatwood, recently installed vice-president for news at CBS's sixteen owned-and-operated stations, encourage the kind of stunting that earned him a reputation for tabloid TV elsewhere (Miami, Boston, Philadelphia)? Cheatwood was at WMAQ in Chicago in 1997 when the station hired Jerry Springer to deliver commentary — a move that caused WMAQ's respected anchor team of Carol Marin and Ron Magers to quit on principle. Possible early warning signal: Cheatwood also serves as news director of the flagship WCBS in New York. His first order of business is to salvage the station from its news-ratings swamp.

— Neil Hickey  
Hickey is CJR's editor at large.

# "ATTY-TOOD"

Knight Ridder would like to congratulate the Philadelphia Daily News for maintaining what Philadelphians call an "atty-tood" for the past 75 years.

With ninety percent of its circulation coming from street sales, the paper has to be a compelling buy every day. The

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is willing to ask questions no one else will ask, so it can print answers everyone wants to know.

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Much of the personality of the paper derives from Editor Zack Stalberg. Under his tenure, his tightknit confederacy of self-proclaimed rogues and scoundrels—serious about their work but not about themselves—have won two Pulitzer Prizes. The paper's latest adventure, "Rethinking Philadelphia," is turning heads and changing how the city feels about itself.

It started out as a story, then a one-shot project and is now a permanent department. Its purpose is to help Philadelphians imagine: "What if?"

And over the course of time it has been changing the "atty-tood" of people from the streets, to the newsroom, to City Hall.

Knight Ridder is extremely proud of the Philadelphia Daily News and its ability to connect emotionally with its readers.

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- Fort Worth Star-Telegram
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- Contra Costa Newspapers
- Philadelphia Daily News

- Akron Beacon Journal
- The (Columbia, S.C.) State
- Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader
- The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle
- The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph
- Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat
- The (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.) Times Leader
- Duluth (Minn.) News-Tribune
- Belleville (Ill.) News-Democrat
- Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer

- The (Biloxi, Miss.) Sun Herald
- The (Fort Wayne, Ind.) News-Sentinel
- The (Myrtle Beach, S.C.) Sun News
- Bradenton (Fla.) Herald
- Grand Forks (N.D.) Herald
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# DARTS & . . .

## BOOK REVIEWING AIN'T BEANBAG

While the American Society of Newspaper Editors was evaluating the results of its million-dollar project, "Building Reader Trust," the nation's top newspapers were providing yet another example of why such a project is needed. The newly published book, *The Hunting of the President*, by Joe Conason and Gene Lyons, clearly called for attention, but one of the book's major themes — how and why mainstream news organizations, notably *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, aided those who were bent on destroying Bill and Hillary Clinton — posed an uncomfortable challenge, to say the least. The response to that challenge was telling. *The New York Times* assigned a review to Neil A. Lewis, a member of its Washington bureau, who completely ignored the book's mountain of negative evidence against the *Times*, singled out the book's one favorable mention of his paper, and judged the authors' "theory" not "plausible." *The Wall Street Journal* took an even safer route, assigning its review to senior writer Micah Morrison, who co-edited with Robert L. Bartley the five-volume collection of WSJ opinion pieces on Whitewater, pieces that figure prominently in Conason and Lyons's case against the press. Taking the offensive, Morrison concluded, unsurprisingly,

ly, that the book was "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." *The Washington Post* went farther afield — but not far enough, assigning its review to one James Bowman, film critic for *The American Spectator*, the publication whose Scaife-funded Arkansas Project, among its other tricks, was designed to dig up dirt on Clinton. The book contains twenty-four references to *The Washington Post*; in Bowman's review, the *Post* appears not once. (At the *Los Angeles Times* the only mention of the book, as of mid-June, has appeared on its best-seller list.) For contrast, see *The Denver Post* ("On the Clinton scandals, this is the book by which to judge all others"); *The Boston Globe* ("the most damning indictment yet written of the partisan forces who fueled [the] scandal rumors . . . The greater story of how so many false stories were treated as truth for so long has yet to be told."); and *Newsday* ("[The authors'] extensive research yielded evidence of a behavior pattern among disparate Clinton haters who found financial angels to initiate litigation, spawn damning videos, bankroll magazine articles, etc., etc.") Question: How do editors explain to already distrustful readers why favorable reviews of *The Hunting of the President* could be found only in papers not cited by the authors in their "most damning indictment" of the press?

## FUTURISTIC NEWS

If you read about the local Lions Club's annual pancake fundraiser in the *Wichita Business Journal*, you learned that members, reveling in the "afterglow of 2000's successful Pancake Day," were tired from their work "before and after" the feed, and that the "hungry customers," who "began lining up before 7 A.M., . . . didn't quit coming until way after sunset." But if you read about the event in *The Wichita Eagle*, you were served a less syrupy story. "Wind, sleet, and snow," the *Eagle* reported, had "kept the crowd light"; the hall had been "largely empty" in the morning, though "diners had trickled in the rest of the day," and the total number of people served was 1,700 less than last year. How to account for the stack of discrepancies? The weekly *Business Journal*, which went to press the morning of the event, cooked the story in advance, while the daily *Eagle*'s piece came right from the griddle.

## INFORMATION, PLEASE

(With apologies to Comden and Green:)

*Why, O why, O why-O, Why do they mock the F-O-I laws in O-hi-o?*

Consider: when *The Columbus Dispatch*, set to launch a story about Governor Bob Taft's fund-raising follies on Sunday, March 15, learned that it would likely be scooped on the story by the rival *Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, it raced furiously to match the *P-D*'s publication on Saturday, March 14. Then, still more furiously, the *Dispatch* tried to hunt down the mole who had tipped the *Plain Dealer* to the *Dispatch*'s story. The paper's weapon of choice: Ohio's public-records law. As revealed by Columbus's alternative *Other Paper*, *Dispatch* reporters invoked (some might say perverted) the public-records law to ask political and government officials to provide, among other things, the phone records of the chief suspect. As the *P-D*'s statehouse bureau chief noted dryly, "That's an interesting use of resources." An even more "interesting use


of resources" emerged in April — from an opposite camp. In its response to *The Plain Dealer*'s perfectly legitimate request for review of, among other records, the city's complaint investigation unit, the Office of Mayor Michael R. White announced that henceforth every news organization would be notified automatically of every request for public records. What's more, those records would be made available not only to the news organization initiating the request, but to all the other media as well. Whether this unusual new policy will "minimize staffing costs and preparation time," as the mayor's office claims, or whether it will make reporters hesitate to use the law lest they alert the competition, as some journalists fear, remains to be seen. Meanwhile, information on the city council's community development block grant budget, which had been requested by Roldo Bartimole of the alternative *Free Times*, was released to other outlets, including the *P-D*; while five pounds of information relating to the mayor's club memberships showed up at a local television station before copies arrived at the *P-D*, the originator of the request. Where will it all end?

# ... LAURELS


## MEDICAL COVERAGE

 When the FDA announced on March 22 that it was pulling the hot new diabetes drug Rezulin off the market because of potentially fatal side effects, many if not most Americans were taken by surprise. But for those who had encountered the work of David Willman in the *Los Angeles Times*, the only logical response could be, What took them so long? Fifteen months before, in his two-part report (December 6-7, 1998), Willman was already on the track of the "fast-track" drug — the thirty-three previously undisclosed Rezulin-related deaths; the agency's rejection of early warnings and its decision to remove the reviewing medical officer who had opposed quick approval of the drug; its banishment by the British counterpart of the FDA. In the weeks and months that followed, Willman stayed on track, analyzing records; interviewing scientists, patients, and officials; exposing unconscionable conflicts of interest that were known to, and dismissed by, the FDA (two members of the FDA panel weighing Rezulin's safety, for example, were recipients of grant money from Warner-Lambert, maker of the billion-dollar pill). Along the way, the *Times* probe prompted the FDA to undertake various internal "re-evaluations" that resulted in increasingly restricted use; finally, with the March 22 announcement, the 300,000 patients who had not been changed over to safer medicine were no longer at risk of prescribed death.


## HIGH-OCTANE JOURNALISM

 *Oxy-Fuel News* is a weekly trade publication that updates developments in the reformulated gasoline and alternative fuel industries. Last summer, in the August 16, 1999 issue, the newsletter delivered to its handful of subscribers an explosive investigative report that continues to reverberate across the country. Written by editor Carolyn Keplinger, the 3,800-word article released some foul-smelling facts about the EPA and its handling of MTBE, the oxygenate added to 70 percent of the gasoline sold in the U.S. to meet the air pollution standards required by law since 1990. Keplinger's evidence — gathered during a year of lunch hours spent digesting documents in the EPA files in Washington and backed by interviews with agency officials, city administrators, and industry leaders — is damning. Not only has the high-risk chemical caused widespread contamination of groundwater from leaking storage tanks in numerous cities — Santa Monica, California, to cite one example, was forced to shut down its water supply in 1997 when drinking and bathing water began to taste and smell like turpentine — but more disgusting still, the EPA knew about the dangers of MTBE to water from the start, even while approving its use for cleaning the air. Worse, with congressional bills currently stalled in committee and the corn lobby pushing for ethanol as a substitute (a solution, Keplinger warns, that may carry hazards of its own), no happy ending is in sight; what's left is a maddening story of governmental ignorance and stupidity visited on hapless citizens. (The exposé got national attention five months later when *60 Minutes* picked it up in a double segment (January 16, 2000) that made no mention whatsoever of Keplinger or *Oxy-Fuel News*.)

## RELIGION AND REALITY

 Vows of celibacy notwithstanding, Catholic priests are dying of AIDS at a rate four times higher than that of the general U.S. population, but, significantly enough, at the November convention of U.S. bishops the subject did not come up. Such dangerous silence will be hard to preserve after Judy L. Thomas's illuminating series in *The Kansas City Star*. Based on a confidential nationwide survey of 3,000 priests (the text of which was reprinted in the *Star*); on an examination of scores of (sometimes false) death certificates and church documents; on interviews with hundreds of priests, church officials, and AIDS experts; and on visits to an AIDS hospice and a sex-education school for priests, the series took a nonsensational approach to a controversial story that, as editor Mark Ziemann acknowledged in a note to the many upset readers, "strikes straight at the heart of church doctrine." The message of the series itself, wrote Ziemann (noting that he himself is Catholic), is that "dying of AIDS is a preventable tragedy. Ignorance and fear and death can give way, through compassion, to knowledge and understanding and life."

## LESSONS FOR EDUCATORS

 Self-murder among kids is rampant. With bullets and rope, by drowning and pills, through crashing their cars and slashing their wrists, even by provoking police, an appalling number of Americans under the age of nineteen have come to choose death as a reasonable way of dealing with the difficulties of life. For schools, the implications are profound. School may, because of various pressures, be too painful for a child to face; school is where suicidal students commonly commit the act; school liability adds an economic component to the awfulness of the tragedy. In "Teen Suicide: The Silent Epidemic," *Education Week* confronts all those issues and more. Drawing on over a hundred interviews, assistant editor Jessica Portner's interdisciplinary two-part report (April 12, 19) weaves together statistics, research, case studies, and current theory, emphasizing the often-inadequate budgets for school psychologists as well as successful, new approaches to prevention. (One familiar point that bears repeating here: unrestrained press coverage, the experts believe, contributes to the very real phenomenon of copy-cat acts.) Alarming and informative, thoughtful and challenging, *Teen Suicide* brings society's darkest failure into the light.

The Darts & Laurels column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.

# Peace Comes To Denver

*The Great Newspaper War Wasn't All That Great for Readers. What Will the Truce Bring?*

BY ALAN PRENDERGAST

Until a fateful Thursday in May of this year, the staff of the *Denver Rocky Mountain News* had no clue that they were working for a failing enterprise. In fact, by the usual indicators reporters use to keep score on such matters, they were clearly winning their battle with *The Denver Post*, in one of the last great newspaper wars in the country.

Last year the *News*, owned by E.W. Scripps Company, regained the daily circulation lead for the first time since 1997, thanks to absurdly cheap subscription rates that made the tabloid the fastest-growing paper in the country. Advertising revenues had climbed nearly 25 percent over the past five years, and the paper has routinely crushed the *Post*, owned by MediaNews Group, in statewide journalism contests. This spring the *News* picked up a Pulitzer Prize, its first in 141 years of operation, for its spot news photography of the mass killings at Columbine High

School. True, the *Post's* Columbine coverage won a Pulitzer, too, for breaking news, but the *News* stalwarts had every reason to feel good about themselves. Almost every week, it seemed, there was another party in the office to celebrate some circulation milestone or editorial coup. The sheetcakes kept coming.

But while the troops savored the well-frosted spoils of victory, their corporate generals at Scripps were secretly suing for peace. On May 11 editor John Temple gathered the faithful and made a stunning announcement: Scripps had agreed to pay \$60 million to place the *News* in a fifty-year Joint Operating Agreement with the *Post*. The business operations of both papers would be combined, and the parent companies would share equally in the profits. Scripps chairman William R. Burleigh called the deal "even-steven."

Still, the arrangement, subject to Justice Department approval, calls for both papers to continue to publish daily, but the *News* would abandon its Sunday edition and produce the only Saturday paper. The war was over, and the *News* had lost.

Indeed, if you believe the JOA application, the paper's wildly successful circulation strategy was a death-spiral that could only end in merger or extinction. Neither Scripps nor MediaNews had previously divulged the finances of either paper, and reporters were stunned to learn that the *News* had suffered \$123 million in operating losses over the past ten years while the *Post* claimed \$200 million in profits.

The *News* tried to put a hopeful spin on the story. NEWS-POST TRUCE, read the next morning's headline. But the *Post* couldn't resist a little gloating: ROCKY SEEKS TRUCE, POST AGREES TO JOINT OPERATION WITH FAILING PAPER. The tone of the broadsheet's coverage — which portrayed MediaNews chairman William Dean Singleton as a superhero streaking to the rescue of two independent, daily editorial voices in Denver — so rankled *News* editor Temple that he responded in an unusual editorial. "They stuck a thumb in the eye of their new partner, instead of extending a hand," he wrote. "The clear difference in approach of the two newspapers is among the reasons that I am so confident you'll continue to be loyal to the *News*."

Many readers might take issue with Temple's assertion that there's a



clear difference between the two papers, other than their size. Fixated on chasing each other as much as the news, the Denver dailies tend to mirror each other, like twins at a mime convention. Thus, among the many questions raised by any JOA proposal — fears of diminished coverage, declining quality, rising costs to consumers and advertisers, and the like — there is an additional perplexity in Denver. Given the sameness of the products, is the kind of journalistic competition practiced here truly worth preserving?

**F**or the past twenty years analysts have predicted the imminent demise of one newspaper or the other in Denver, only to be shamed into silence when first the *Post* and then the *News* staged astonishing comebacks. Pulitzers aside, their survival may have less to do with enduring editorial excellence than the blazing Colorado economy over the past seven years or so. But it's also true that every time one of these softhearted palookas has had the other on the ropes, the knockout punch has been wanting. In recent years each side attempted to stay the course, woo the suburbs, and offend no one.

Some enthusiasts predict that a grandly profitable joint operation will allow both papers to devote more resources to newsgathering. Others are skeptical. "Competition doesn't necessarily guarantee great newspapers," notes Neil Westergaard, a former executive editor of the *Post*, now editor of the *Denver Business Journal*. "But with a JOA, the consequences of not doing your job are somewhat removed from the equation. You make money whether you put out a great product or not."

The recent potshots over the "truce" are a far cry from the ferocious rivalry the two papers once enjoyed. A century ago the *Post* was the plaything of Harry Tammen and Frederick Bonfils, hustlers with a flair for promotional stunts, lurid crime stories, and headlines dripping in red ink. (One classic front-page offering posed the question, DOES IT HURT TO BE BORN?) The upstart enterprise was so successful that the *News* — the older, establishment newspaper — accused the *Post*, "that blackmailing, blackguarding, nauseous sheet which stinks to high heaven," of extorting contracts from advertisers in exchange for suppressing unflattering stories. Shortly after Bonfils was lampooned in the

competition as Captain Kidd, he sucker-punched *News* editor Thomas Patterson in broad daylight on a public street. "Mr. Patterson received a well-merited thrashing," Bonfils wrote on his editorial page the next day.

That was in 1907. Bonfils's feud with the *News* lasted another twenty-six years. He was pursuing a libel suit against the paper when he abruptly dropped dead; an ear infection had "worked its way into the brain," according to his front-page obituary. With his passing, respectability descended on the *Post* like a shroud.

After World War II, the paper emerged as the premier daily in the intermountain West, "the Voice of the Rocky Mountain Empire," guided by its high-minded editor, Palmer Hoyt. For decades the *News* was content to play the also-ran while the *Post* built its regional appeal — beefing up staff, courting subscribers in several states, and watching its profit margins shrink.

The race began to change character in the 1970s, as legions of young professionals moved to Denver and found they preferred the feisty morning tabloid to the graying afternoon giant. By 1980 the *News* had regained the daily circulation lead, and the cash-strapped *Post* was on the auction block.

Times Mirror came to the rescue in 1980, importing a group of savvy executives to rejuvenate the *Post*. They switched from afternoon to morning delivery — and lost readers. They introduced a brand of in-your-face investigative journalism Denver had never seen before — and lost more readers. They dispatched gifted feature writers across the West for months at a time, to assemble epic reports on such subjects as the Mormon Church or the Colorado River — and, well, you get the idea. Meanwhile the *News* focused on building the best comics page known to man and solidified its lead.

After seven years of fruitless tinkering, Times Mirror decided it had had enough. The company sold the *Post* to MediaNews for \$95 million, the same price Times Mirror had paid, and threw in a new printing plant to seal the deal. When news of the sale leaked out, many



Dean Singleton: he surprised everyone

staffers figured the *Post* was doomed. MediaNews president Dean Singleton wasn't known for tossing good money after bad; soon after picking up the *Post*, in fact, he pulled the plug on failing papers in Dallas and Houston.

But Singleton surprised everyone. He brought in a stable management team; a charismatic editor, Gil Spencer, formerly of the New York *Daily News*; and pushed for mundane but essential improvements in printing and delivery. The *Post* rode out a nasty recession that claimed some of its biggest advertisers and embarked on a decade of steady circulation growth.

At the same time the *Rocky Mountain News*, stumbling with production and pricing problems, seemed ill-prepared to snag the hundreds of thousands of new residents who flooded into the Denver metro area as the economy bounced back.

Three years ago the *Post* reclaimed the daily lead, and the protracted struggle entered its latest phase. Weary of chasing its rival across the state, the *News* decided to redefine the battlefield. The paper ended its home delivery (and, for the most part, its distribution) in fifty of Colorado's sixty-three counties, reasoning that the outlying readership was simply too expensive to maintain. Instead, the war would be waged in the cities along the Front Range. To underscore the point, the tabloid added the word "Denver" to its name.

The Front Range strategy hinged on the deep discounts the *News* offered new subscribers in order to saturate Denver's

booming suburbs. In effect, the paper resurrected a time-honored Scripps tradition: the penny press. For as little as four or five bucks a year — less for canny negotiators — a couple in the right Zip code could have the *News* delivered every day, right to their SUV-studded driveway.

Publicly, *Post* publisher Jerry Grilly deplored the cheap subscription deals, saying that they “devalued” the product. Privately, the *Post*’s circulation wizards did their best to match them. Before long, telemarketers were begging demographically desirable readers to scoop up the papers at almost any price. The deals allowed the *News* to snatch the daily lead again — and break out those sheetcakes. According to the latest figures, the paper gained a whopping 90,000 readers over the same audit period a year earlier. Thanks to the steady influx of flatlanders flocking to the state, the *Post* has continued to build numbers, too. Yet throughout it all, the *News* was losing money, while the *Post*, which apparently did not slash ad rates with the zest of its rival, continued to be profitable.

**P**revailing wisdom aside, pyrrhic competition rarely makes for good journalism. In Denver, the rush to hit the streets with the latest twist in the big “talk” stories of the day produced a rash of half-formed exclusives that would have benefited from more reporting time. The mania for such stories tied up resources and may have actually discouraged more ambitious projects dealing with topics that nobody was talking about — yet. When the driving force is the fear of getting beat, everybody ends up with much of the same stuff.

In recent years Denver has been awash in high-profile stories — the Oklahoma City bombing trials, the JonBenet Ramsey case, Columbine. Yet the local response has been, in large measure, a litany of missed opportunities. Every possible development in the JonBenet story, including the most trivial, received ample play; but then, the Ramseys are large targets, and neither paper risked anything by tussling over reported sperm traces and tearjerker headlines. (The *News* won that contest: LITTLE MISS CHRISTMAS IS PUT TO REST IN GEORGIA.)

When the story struck closer to home, a curious circumspection set in. Determined to skirt sensationalism and



**News editor John Temple (white shirt, seated) and his staff cheer a Pulitzer win.**

mindful of their “obligations to the community” (a code phrase, perhaps, for hypersensitivity to advertisers, circulation figures, and access to sources), the editors overseeing the Big Story coverage have embarked on a course that is tasteful, often maudlin, and sometimes downright soporific.

The Columbine coverage is a case in point. In the days following the massacre, both sides mobilized with alacrity, wading through a morass of grief and horror, trying to sort out a flood of rumors about the killers’ backgrounds and confused accounts from hysterical eyewitnesses. But as the months dragged on, and as the papers focused increasingly on inspirational stories about how the survivors were coping with the tragedy, some of the more uncomfortable questions about the event were raised elsewhere. In *Time* magazine, for instance, which revealed the virulent contents of the videotapes made by the killers. And in the online magazine *Salon*, which correctly challenged a legend about one shooting victim, who, it turns out, was not the one who said “yes” when the killers asked her if she believed in God, despite a book and numerous Web sites that say she was. The Denver papers prepared voluminous, predictable “hope and healing” packages for the one-year anniversary of the shootings, but failed to adequately anticipate a legitimate news story that threatened to, and did, emerge at the last minute: the filing of lawsuits by victims’ families, alleging that the police emer-

gency response was inadequate and may have contributed to more deaths.

That’s not to say that enterprise reporting is dead at either paper. Recently the *Post* had a corker about nepotism in the Denver Civil Service Commission that prompted the resignation of the agency’s director. A few days later, the *Sunday News* ran a lengthy report on a gold mine called Summitville, an environmental disaster in southern Colorado caused by poor mining regulation. These days, for the tabloid to devote eight pages to a story that has no reference to Columbine is not just an aberration; it’s a miracle.

Perhaps such stories are a sign of things to come, but don’t count on it. Reporters at the *News* complain of being chronically understaffed, a situation that may ease somewhat under a JOA, with no Sunday paper to produce. But then, there won’t be any showcase for eight-page specials, either. Singleton has promised to add bodies to the *Post* newsroom, but since the retirement of Gil Spencer a few years ago, the *Post* has endured numerous editorial shakeups and a disturbing exodus of veteran talent. Spencer’s successor, Dennis Britton, former *Chicago Sun-Times* editor, pushed “positive news” and winnowed staff. He quickly became the target of newsroom wags and an anonymous Web site that campaigned relentlessly for his removal, the “Dennis Britton Go Home! Page.” Britton finally took the site’s advice last fall, when he was let go. The paper’s current editor, its ninth in

AP PHOTO/DENVER ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS/ANDREW

twenty years, is Glenn Guzzo, former managing editor of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, who's earned high marks from staff for calming the waters and boosting morale.

Even without the merger, Denver's rapid growth has effected a suburban retooling of both papers that has stripped them of much of the individual quirks they once had. As a Denver native, I miss the sprawling regional coverage of the old *Post* and the former edginess of the *News* — which, in my youth, was so contrarian as to campaign successfully to keep the Winter Olympics out of Colorado. Both shops are now populated with fresh faces who are still struggling to adapt to the quirks of their adopted home, just like the immaculately coiffed folks on local TV trying, and failing, to pronounce the city's unique Spanish and Native American street names.

What passes for an institutional memory at the *News* resides in the revered personage of Gene Amole, a former broadcaster whose career in the local media spans six decades; his nostalgic column appears too infrequently to suit me. Over at the *Post*, the geezer role is filled by Chuck Green, a former editor and longtime fixture of the paper who's written dozens of tissue-thin meditations on the Ramsey case, Columbine, or nothing at all. (One recent column was headlined, *AN EXPERT AT FILLING THIS SPACE*, and proceeded to show how easy it is to fill twelve inches of newsprint with drivel.) Every few months Green writes a cornball hymn to the beauty of Colorado and urges readers to take a stroll in the mountains, echoing the *Post's* old slogan, "Tis a privilege to live in Colorado."

Maybe it still is a privilege. But for whom? The single most neglected story in both Denver dailies has been the saga of Colorado's phenomenal population growth over the past decade and the changes it has wrought. Business stories about new housing starts and hi-tech start-ups are plentiful, but issues such as environmental degradation, soulless subdivisions, snarled traffic, shoddy homebuilders, strapped school districts, overcrowded prisons and the like haven't received quite the same attention.

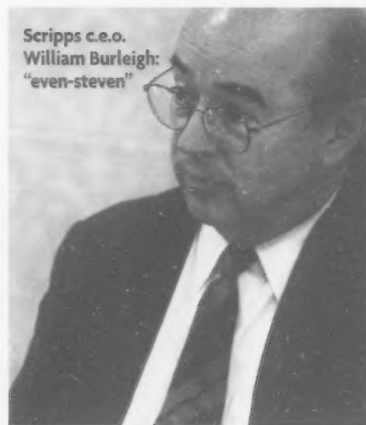
Perhaps the neglect of such matters is how newspapers at war express their sensitivity to the community. But now that

peace has broken out, can we dare to hope for an end to the boosterism?

Call me skeptical. The frenzied growth is what kept Denver's dailies going for so long; it made the *News* the most successful failing paper in recent memory. If they weren't willing to bite that hand when they were fighting for their lives, it seems unlikely that they'll do so when there's nothing at stake but professional pride. In a way, the two papers have already been serving the same master for a long, long time. ■

*Alan Prendergast is a staff writer for the Denver weekly Westword and teaches journalism at The Colorado College.*

Scripps c.e.o.  
William Burleigh:  
"even-steven"



ESPERANZA SUAREZ/THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE



## Announces THE KAISER MEDIA FELLOWS IN HEALTH FOR 2000

### Six journalists have been selected as 2000 Kaiser Media Fellows:

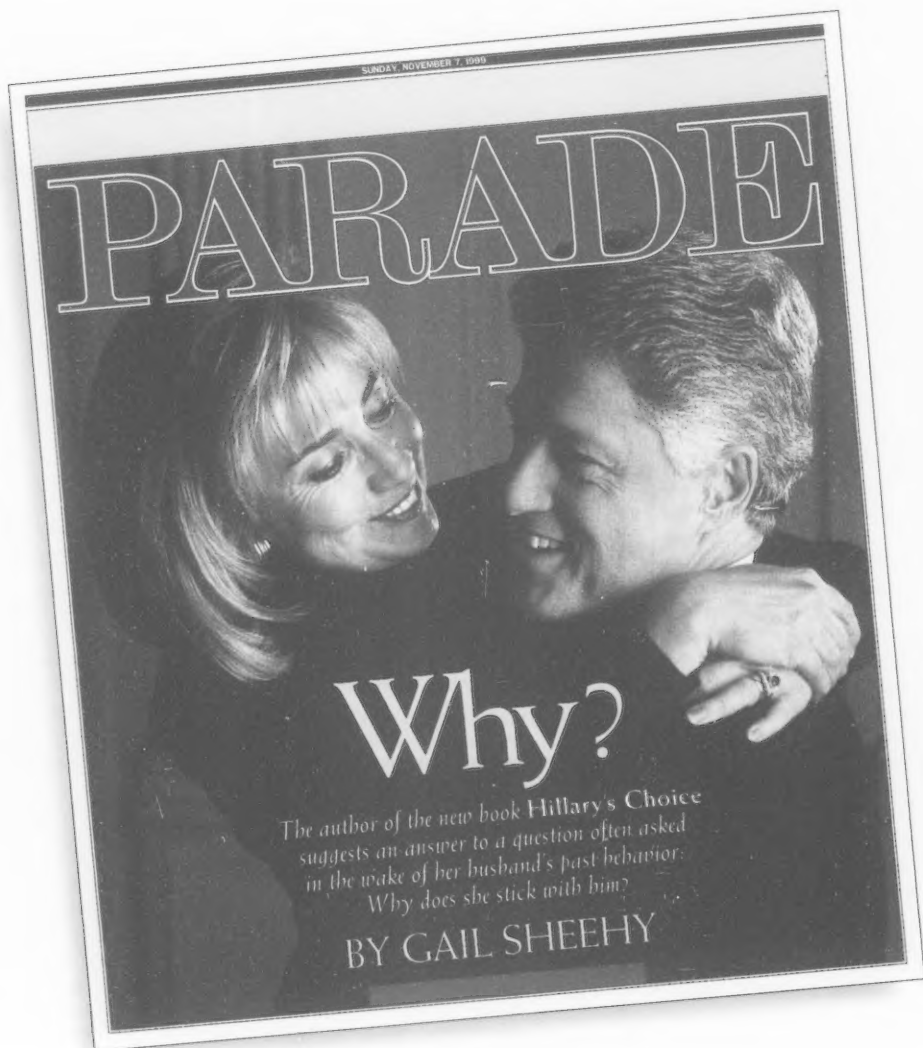
- John A. Cutter**, freelance health/aging writer, Clear Water, FL  
Project: Alzheimer's disease - prevention research, access to new treatments, and the impact of the disease on patients and their families
- Mason L. Essif**, segment producer, *Health Week*-PBS, Washington, DC  
Project: The e-revolution in health care - how the Internet is affecting access and quality of health information, communication between providers and patients, and medical commerce
- Sarah Lunday**, health care industry reporter, *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*  
Project: The impact of prescription drugs on the health care industry - financial, ethical, medical and political
- Teresa L. Schraeder, M.D.**, freelance medical journalist and physician, Boston, MA  
Project: Television reporting of health and medical news—a critical look at the content and accuracy of medical news coverage, and its impact on medical decision-making
- Stephen Smith**, managing editor & correspondent, *American RadioWorks*, Minnesota Public Radio  
Project: The apparent epidemic of depressive illness in the U.S. and worldwide - possible causes, emerging treatments and the varying social responses to mental illness
- Karl Stark**, health care business reporter, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
Project: The quality of medical care - what data can really help doctors provide high quality treatment, and help patients find good care?

In 2001, the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program will again award up to six fellowships to print, television and radio journalists and editors interested in health policy, healthcare financing and public health issues. Information about the 2001 program will be available shortly, with applications due in March 2001. The aim is to provide journalists with a highly flexible range of opportunities to pursue individual projects, combined with group briefings and site visits on a wide range of health and social policy issues.

For more information, or to apply for the 2001 awards, visit our website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org); or write/e-mail:

Penny Duckham  
Executive Director of the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program  
Kaiser Family Foundation  
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TURNING POINT

# TURNING POINT

*Content, Content Everywhere: Now It's Time To Pay*

It's hard to read history from the middle of the action, but the summer of 2000 feels like a turning point for dot-com journalism, a moment when the search for a viable business model got serious. Like a vast game of musical chairs when the music stops.

Exhibit A is *APBnews.com*, the criminal justice Web site that let 140 people go in June and was hanging by its fingernails at press time. *APB* had a roomful of talented journalists. It had content that won contests and respect. It had a long list of creative ideas for making money. What it ran out of, not long after the Nasdaq's spring dive, was patient money, investors willing to place another bet that those ideas would eventually pay.

A news dot-com or two down the drain in no way marks the beginning of the decline of new media journalism. The online news audience is growing. Fifteen percent of Americans go online for news every day, more than double the figure just two years ago. More college graduates under fifty go to the Internet daily than watch the evening network news, according to the latest study from Pew Research Center. And they can find a great deal of journalism there, most of it free. But all this makes the question more insistent: Who will pay for it?

Web-based journalism is in its infancy. As Frank Houston writes, we're in a moment not unlike the nanoseconds after the Big Bang, when things began to coalesce. After the Bang, certain forces shaped reality, and to say they were important is quite an understatement. Had gravity been slightly stronger, stars would

have flamed out in a single year instead of billions. Had the "strong" force that holds atoms together been a little weaker, no stars would have shined in the first place. And so forth.

This package of articles, then, is an attempt to take a look at the forces shaping the smaller universe of dot-com journalism at a moment when competitive and economic and technical forces are giving it shape. Houston, on page 22, explores what the explosion of dot-com dreams has yielded, in terms of news on the Web, and invites us to enjoy it while we can. James Ledbetter, on page 26, describes the problems at the heart of the search for a successful business model, problems that give rise to dot-com doubts. Houston, again, looks at how the economic and competitive forces are pulling on one site, *Salon.com*, which cut some 15 percent of its editorial staff in June even as it is trying to expand. Robert S. Boynton, on page 29, looks at what these forces mean for old media, and comes up with a surprising answer. Katherine Fulton, on page 30, takes the long view and sees that these forces will forge a new way of thinking about what the word "news" means.

If profits are in short supply, it stands to reason that journalistic standards on the Web will be under pressure. Tracy McNamara outlines the central issue on page 31. Anne Colamosca explores what the shadow of a shakeout means to the dot-com job market. And with online journalism at a turning point, how does a job-seeker make a judgment? Brent Cunningham has some answers on page 33. ■

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Should America Share Nuclear Defense Technology With Other Nations?

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# Enjoy The Ride While It Lasts

BY FRANK HOUSTON

If the Web can be considered in cosmological terms, then right about now we're in the infinite nanosecond after the Big Bang, an inflationary moment when all that matter spreads itself out. Now things start to coalesce. New technologies and faster connectivity are at work, as is the gravity of financial pressure.

In five years thousands of media jobs have come into existence. Headlines that once surprised — "Net Draining Talent from Print Media" — seem familiar. New journalistic content is being created everywhere, but though the audience is continually growing (recent estimates have hit 200 million), it is finite. If one can read breaking news on literally dozens of different sites, for example, how many headline services are likely to prosper?

Yet if there's a chance that some of this new journalism won't be around in another five years, that gives us all the more reason to enjoy the ride while it lasts.

Consider one site, *7am.com*, as a measure of the variety of news sources now pulsing updates across the Web every minute of the day. Along with its own breaking stories, the site hosts news from CNNfn, *The Washington Post*, Reuters, the Sports Network, *The Sporting News*, ESPN, *Eurosport*, *Wired*, *ZDNet News*, *Mr. Showbiz*, *E! Online*, CNN Politics, *Salon.com*, *China Times*, CNet Hong Kong, the *Bangkok Post*, and *Wine Spectator*, among many others. A streamlined headline service, with an appealingly utilitarian design, *7am.com* benefits from its singularity of purpose.

Need to keep up with the technology sector? It's also nice to know there are at least a dozen sites where you can get just

about any information you need for free, even as you wonder how they all can possibly thrive.

Every new media company faces this question, particularly those with shareholders. In answer, some are trying to grow into household names, big enough to attract enough readers to survive an increasingly competitive and corporate environment (see "Get Big, Sell Out, or Die," page 28).

Others are trying new business models (See "Where the Infinite Meets the Finite," page 26). As an offshoot of escalating wars for attention, we will see a lot of new media brands extending into traditional media, particularly in the form of dot-com-connected television. "Ubiquity is the buzzword of the new millennium," says Lisa Napoli, who covers the Internet for MSNBC. "You need to reach people in places that aren't always logical for you. And it turns out that there is no illogical place to reach people."

The Web may have become a corporate playground in recent years, but it was built to be a delivery system, plain and simple. So journalism has serious competition with other sources of information. Governments, nonprofits, and non-governmental agencies all offer rich and comprehensive Web sites. I can go to [www.nyclink.org/health](http://www.nyclink.org/health) to find the hard facts on how my favorite restaurant fared in its most recent inspection. Or to *Vote.com* to see a quick poll on banning soft money in politics, or vouchers in education.

Still, journalism permeates the digital space. Specialized-content planets are orbiting subject areas like crime and health and religion and entertainment and finance. Other sites draw readers based on race and ethnicity and gender. Sites like CNN and *Salon.com* want to be solar systems unto themselves. And the big

TURNING A  
TWO

portals — AOL, Yahoo!, MSN, Disney's Go Network — want to be the gatekeepers of entire quadrants. By now online readers can get nearly any approach to the news, from investigative to literary to activist, with criticism (film, television, books) folded in.

**N**ew forces may threaten the lovely disorder of this universe. By spring, a digital transformation was being written in New York City stone. At Columbus Circle, on the southwest corner of Central Park, one of Manhattan's most desirable pieces of real estate was giving birth to the future. The Coliseum, a cavernous convention hall created by Robert Moses in 1956, was on schedule to disappear by September. In its dust, pending government approval, will rise the headquarters of the new global digital titan, AOL Time Warner.

Technologically mighty AOL becomes a platform for content-mighty Time Warner, with its magazine empire, CNN broadcasts, Warner Records, and Warner Brothers films. AOL Time Warner boasts more than 100 million combined subscribers. The company is carving its recognizable initials into a cityscape that is home to a sizable portion of the Internet's content creators, and it will have great power over them. "When they link to you, they open the spigot," says David Talbot, the founder and editor of *Salon.com*. "They can make or break you."

Meanwhile, speaking at an investor conference in Hong Kong via a video link from New York in May, Rupert Murdoch unveiled a plan to bundle News Corp's content and distribution assets into one platform, unofficially named Platco. The media baron promised that strategic partners, to be announced later this summer, would be chosen based on "what people can bring us technologically so we can speed this up." The announcement came just weeks after rumored talks between Murdoch's number two, Peter Chernin, and Yahoo! co-founder Jerry Yang, raising the possibility that AOL's biggest rival in the Internet portal game might find its way onto News Corp satellite systems, while Murdoch's news holdings would be prominently featured on the Web's second most popular home page. (According to Media Metrix, AOL sites had nearly 60 million unique visitors, to Yahoo's 50 million, in April 2000.)

Are corporate chieftains salivating at the prospect of carving the Internet up for themselves? AOL's c.e.o., Steve Case, has always denied it. "Unlike radio and television, the Internet is not the product of scarcity; and unlike telephony and cable, the Internet is not the natural home of monopolists," he told the National Press Club in October 1998. "The Internet is — and should be — whatever its users, not private or public gatekeepers, want it to be."

It is hard to imagine that the Internet could be truly monopolized, although consolidation will surely reshape digital space as it has old media. Still, at least for now, exploring the Web feels like a ride through a limitless universe.

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### The History of Memorial Day

Twenty-four (24) communities nationwide lay claim to being the birthplace of Memorial Day.

In May 1866, Pres. Lyndon Johnson, on behalf of the U.S. government, sanctioned Waterloo, New York, as the "official" birthplace of Memorial Day because that community's earliest observance 100 years earlier in 1866 was considered so well planned and complete. Among the earliest communities which felt inspired to set aside a special day for remembrance of its war dead were Mobile, Ala.; Montgomery, Ala.; Camden, Ark.; Atlanta, Ga.; Millersville, Ga.; New Orleans, La.; Columbus, Miss.; Jackson, Miss.; Vicksburg, Miss.; Raleigh, N.C.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Charleston, S.C.; Fredericksburg, Va.; Portsmouth, Va.; Vero Beach, Va.; and Washington, D.C.


**SPECIALIZED SITES** This spring *iServed.com*, an Internet publisher of military content, acquired the venerable military newspaper *Stars and Stripes* ([www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com)). Soon after that, on May 10, the site disclosed new information concerning the alleged massacre of hundreds of civilian Koreans by American troops at No Gun Ri, questioning the credibility of individuals identified by The Associated Press as eyewitnesses to the incident in its Pulitzer Prize-winning 1999 report. The Web site for *U.S. News & World Report* filed a similar story. Within days, the No Gun Ri affair was the subject of a major discussion.

*Stripes.com* — like *maingate.com* and Ross Perot-backed *militaryhub.com*, both portals — takes aim at the global audience of active duty personnel, reservists, veterans, military family members, and enthusiasts that has been estimated at 70 to 80 million. *Military.com*'s goal is to "collect the stories of the men and women who have served . . . give voice to those who made history and context to those who want to learn more."

*Stars and Stripes* and other military news and information sites are just one of a seemingly endless array of budding, niche-oriented media enterprises. For access to straight information about criminal justice, for example, it's hard to beat *crimetime.com*, operated by Crime Time Publishing. The new *crime.com*, meanwhile, seems to be trying to slip into APBNews.com's niche.

Tech-world news, of course, is well represented on the electronic frontier. The sites seem endless — *HotWired* ([hotwired.lycos.com](http://hotwired.lycos.com)) isn't alone in offering what it calls "continuous updates from the digital front." There is also *CNet*, *ZDNet*, *techweb.com* ([www.techWeb.com](http://www.techWeb.com)), as well as online versions of print magazines that grew out of the tech boom, such as *Red Herring* ([www.redherring.com](http://www.redherring.com)), *The Industry Standard* ([www.thestandard.com](http://www.thestandard.com)), and Time Warner's new *eCompany* ([www.ecompany.com](http://www.ecompany.com)). Not to mention ample coverage of the industry's content beehive, Silicon Alley, from *AtNew York*, ([www.news-ny.com](http://www.news-ny.com)) and the *Silicon Alley Reporter* ([www.siliconalleyreporter.com](http://www.siliconalleyreporter.com)), which also allows you to "switch coasts" to L.A. for the *Digital Coast Daily*.

Want health news? Both *WebMD* and the financially troubled *drkoop.com* provide it, as does the Mayo Clinic's *Health Oasis*, at [www.mayohealth.org](http://www.mayohealth.org). (Like many sites, this one also


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links to commerce — the “Health e-Store,” where readers can find books and newsletters about health topics.)

Spiritual health also gets online attention, some of it from the massive *beliefnet.com* portal, which provides news and also has an impressive array of discussion groups and some top-notch columnists. For the more adventuresome, there’s *The Spirit Channel* ([www.spiritchannel.com](http://www.spiritchannel.com)), which declares itself the world’s first “leading holistic lifestyle brand for the twenty-first century.”

Space buffs have it especially good, with an extraordinary amount of online resources at their fingertips. *Space.com* is a definitive site for coverage of space news from business to science. For an alternative spin there is *NASA Watch* ([www.reston.com/nasa/watch.html](http://www.reston.com/nasa/watch.html)), a news digest published by Reston Communications that has twice been denied press accreditation by NASA, which considers the site a “vanity” publication, a somewhat dubious assessment.

**SPECIALIZED AUDIENCES** Sites that aimed at groups of readers based on race, ethnicity, and gender are multiplying. The portal *Yupi.com* delivers news, sports, entertainment, and free e-mail to the Hispanic community. *Portal Uno* ([www.portaluno.com](http://www.portaluno.com)) links to news organizations in more than twenty European and Latin American countries. Spanish-language specialty publications include *+Web*, which covers the Internet.

*Africana.com*’s goal is to “bring together authoritative information about the whole world of Africa and her diaspora” with “news and comment from Africa, the Americas, and around the world about the lives, experiences, and needs of black people.” It offers a great deal of solid home-grown and reprinted content.

For the gay and lesbian community, *Planet Out* ([www.planetout.com/pno](http://www.planetout.com/pno)) offers news (from *The Advocate*, which has its own site at [www.advocate.com](http://www.advocate.com)), politics, and entertainment coverage to its core audience.

And for women, in addition to the financially muscular *oxygen.com*, the Web companion to the new Oprah-backed women’s cable network, and the women’s portal *iVillage*, there is also *World Woman News* ([www.worldwoman.net](http://www.worldwoman.net)). *World Woman* launched on International Women’s Day in

March. Edited by Leslie Riddoch, who hosts a daily two-hour radio program on BBC Scotland, the site promises to become “a virtual paper written, edited and produced by women and published in every country of the world every month via the Internet.”

Some of the “news” on the Internet comes from advocates, not journalists. *About-Face* ([www.about-face.org](http://www.about-face.org)), combines a gender-based focus with advocacy, combating “negative and distorted images of women” in the media. The main site for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group ([www.pirg.org](http://www.pirg.org)) bolsters an activist approach with hard information. One recent report, “Show Me the Money! A Survey of Payday Lenders,” examined the practices of lenders who charge consumers interest rates of 300 percent or more and who are stepping up lobbying efforts to weaken state laws preventing usury.

*Policy.com* (part of the *voxcap.com* network) is more neutral — a huge, non-partisan public policy resource and community that publishes research, opinions, and information about events shaping public policy. *VoxCap* has nine channels and a few dozen content subchannels (Guns in America, Urban World, etc.).

*Inequality.org* is put out by a network of journalists devoted to “news, information, and expertise on the divide in income, wealth and health.” The site, founded by *US News & World Report* writer James Lardner, publishes original articles and reprints, such as “Time To Rein in Global Finance,” an examination of World Bank and International Monetary Fund policy by William Greider. It also contains contact information for numerous experts, as well as facts, figures, and resources.

**ONLINE MAGAZINES** With so much recent activity, it’s easy to overlook general interest online magazines, which arrived on the Web relatively early. That’s because in some cases, things haven’t changed much since their arrival. *Feed* ([www.feedmag.com](http://www.feedmag.com)) still offers incisive commentary on media, culture, and technology, with an emphasis on discussion. Similarly, *Word* ([www.word.com](http://www.word.com)) covers issues and culture, often presenting personal essays in innovative, graphics-rich formats. Both magazines seem to bow to the info glut, offering a manageable handful of new content each day; the

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downside is that they sometimes seem to have lost some of their momentum.

**H**eavyweights like *Salon* and *Slate* have created general interest news brands online, and are developing television shows to attract eyeballs outside the Web. At the same time, after dipping tentative toes into the online waters in recent years, old media are also creating some innovative Web-only content.

"I come from dinosaurland," Sam Donaldson told attendees of "Silicon Alley 2000" in New York City in March. The former White House correspondent anchors a three-times-a-week video news program on *ABCNews.com*. The site, part of Disney's Go Network, also offers a daily Web-cast called "Political Points," in conjunction with *The New York Times*.

In another sign that boundaries between media have given way to the economics of brand extension, many online news organizations are jumping off-line, into old media. *Space.com* recently announced an agreement with Hearst Magazines to publish *Space.com Illustrated*, which launches from newsstands July 4. *Nerve*, which calls its content "literate smut," is also planning a print magazine.

While *Slate* and *Salon* are producing television shows, AOL Time Warner has something bigger in store: an entire television channel with interactive programming and marketing and new subscription models. In a March speech, AOL Time Warner c.e.o. Steve Case promised that TV was in for a dramatic change. "Basically, TV hasn't changed much since I was growing up," he said. "The biggest difference is that now there are more channels, and it's harder to find things."

Of course, the same goes for the Web. If Case and company have their way, that won't be true when it comes to Time Warner content. Just who gets pulled into their orbit, who stays in independent proximity, and who is cast out into the frosty obscurity and financial no-man's-land of deep space, remains to be seen. ■

Frank Houston is a Brooklyn writer who covers technology and online media. His last piece for CJR was "What I Saw in the Digital Sea," in the July/August 1999 issue.

## HARD NUMBERS

### NOW AND THEN

	CURRENT	1998
Total Web pages	800 million	320 million
Internet magazine advertising:	\$ 687 million (1999)	\$153.7 million
Knight Ridder Internet revenues:	\$40 million (1999)	\$0
Internet advertising revenues:	\$4.6 billion (1999)	\$1.9 billion
Advertising revenues on news and information sites:	\$368 million (1999)	\$152 million
Percentage of publications with Web sites	93 % (1999)	68 %
Percentage of Americans who get daily news off the Web	20 %	6 %

### UNIQUE VISITORS

MSNBC.com in February 2000	8,600,000
CNN.com in February 2000	4,800,000
USATODAY.com in April 2000	1,700,000
Upside.com in April 2000	679,000
Red Herring in April 2000	292,000
NBC.com in April 2000	12,680
MediaNews.com (monthly)	600,000

### USERS

Regular Internet news consumers:	
Men	57 %
Women	43 %
Under 50	75 %

### ETC.

Number of AOL subscribers:	22 million
Number of people employed in Internet-related jobs:	2.5 million
Number of employees fired from APBNews.com in June:	140

— Tracy McNamara

Sources can be found on the CJR Web site ([cjr.org](http://cjr.org)).

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# When The Infinite Meets The Finite

BY JAMES LEDBETTER

**A** long, long time ago — the spring of 1999 — it seemed as if the Internet had sprinkled financial pixie dust upon the publishing industry. Publications that had only been around for a couple of years, like *TheStreet.com* and *CBSMarketWatch.com*, were entering the stock market with smashing success. The market transformed mere Webzines into “Internet content companies” worth as much as a billion dollars. Individual reporters and editors, some barely thirty years old, were said to be worth millions on paper. Old school content providers like newspapers and television networks reshuffled their corporate structures so they, too, could get a slice of fat Net valuations.

But what the stock market gives to Web journalists it can just as easily take away. Today, a year later, most Web content companies — from iVillage to Drkoop.com to *TheStreet.com* — are in the market’s subbasement (along with many other Web companies, particularly retailers). As of early June, *TheStreet.com* was selling at about \$7 a share, nearly one-tenth of its first day closing price and less than half of its initial offering price. *Salon.com*, the San Francisco-based Web magazine that went public in June 1999, rose to \$15, but was selling at \$2.13 a share a year later.

Public financing of these companies has not been a complete disaster. After all, the primary goal of a public offering is not to enrich shareholders; it’s to gain vital financing to help a company grow. Regardless of what Wall Street currently thinks of *TheStreet.com* as an investment, the publication has tens of millions of dollars in the bank and boasts that it can stay alive for several years just on its cash reserves; private capital was unlikely to stick around for that long. There’s also an argument to be made that selling stock to the general public is an effective way of getting one’s name out to potential readers and subscribers — financing with advertising side effects.

Still, the severe downdraft in “content” stocks represents more than just Wall Street’s fickle demands. Investors are expressing disillusion not merely with individual companies, but with the very idea of Internet content as a stand-alone business. And it’s not just public companies that are being punished: the line of content companies waiting to become public has gotten much shorter. While venture capitalists are not quite refusing to invest in content companies, they have become quite finicky about where they choose to invest. Kurt Andersen, co-chair of *Inside.com*, famously said that raising money for his all-star Web project was as easy “as getting laid in 1969,” but for most content players these days, it’s more like 1869.

Why is the market rejecting Internet content companies? It almost goes without saying that none of them makes any money; few show any prospects of making money any time soon. The problem is not, as some early Net publishers feared, that there’s not enough advertising to

support Web-based publishing. The Internet Advertising Bureau claims that \$4.6 billion was spent on Net advertising in 1999. That’s close to what is spent in outdoor advertising. Moreover, the growth of Net ad dollars has been spectacular, more than doubling every year. Boosters claim that Net advertising has grown faster in the medium’s first five years than even the advertising tornado called television did.

The problem, however, is that the Web — unlike magazines, newspapers, television, or radio — has an essentially limitless capacity to handle and eventually dilute advertising. A Web master can create two, three, or more Web pages in about the same amount of time it takes to create one, at no greater cost.

Theoretically, then, the “supply” of Web pages is expanding to infinity. Midyear 2000, there were an estimated 800 million Web pages in existence, and there’s no reason why that number couldn’t double in a few short years. And yes, the number of readers is growing rapidly, but it’s still always a finite number. Elementary economics suggest that advertisers over time will therefore pay less and less to reach about the same num-

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ber of Web readers. That's the kind of math that saddens publishers — and those who would invest in them.

To date, Web publishers have not had strong backup plans. Many have chosen to ally, editorially and financially, with established media conglomerates: *TheStreet.com* took substantial investments from The New York Times Company and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp; the pioneering music site SonicNet sold itself to Viacom; *MarketWatch.com* from the start was branded with the CBS logo. For some, like *MSNBC.com*, the affiliation has led to the kind of massive traffic that makes financial viability seem possible. For others, though, such alliances raise worrisome questions about editorial independence, and appear to be more trouble than they are worth (witness, for example, the dustup between Fox News Network and *TheStreet.com*, after a *Street* commentator touted *Street* stock on Fox, and Fox complained).

Of course, there's always the backup plan that print media have enjoyed for centuries — charge people for content. The theory behind most American newspapers and magazines has always been: if it's worth reading, it's worth paying for. Much to the surprise of some media observers, cable television has also successfully grafted that model onto a medium that had grown rapidly in the '50s and '60s largely because it was free.

Alas, the Internet has whipsawed just about everyone who's tried to reproduce cable's example. Not counting some pornography sites, the only significant Web publisher that has successfully coaxed readers to part with their money is *The Wall Street Journal*. Its main site, *wsj.com*, now charges \$59 a year (\$29 for those who subscribe to the print edition). Despite that toll, more than 400,000 readers worldwide have signed up for the *Interactive Journal*.

Current thinking in the Internet industry is that very few publications are capable of duplicating the *Journal's* pay-for-content success. The *Journal*, after all, is a century-plus old institution with a worldwide reputation as a must-read business publication. Partly for that reason, a good chunk of its online readers put the subscription on their office expense accounts.

Newer, Web-only publications have learned at their peril just how valuable those old-world credentials are. *Slate*, the Microsoft-owned Web magazine edited by Michael Kinsley, experimented with various paid models until February 1999, when it finally went free (its audience has ballooned as a result). *TheStreet.com* was able to gain just over 100,000 paying subscribers before finally admitting at the end of

1999 that it could not grow fast enough using a paid subscription model.

In light of those reversals, it's especially intriguing that the team at *Inside.com* has embraced a paid Web model. *Inside.com's* parent company, Powerful Media, is the New York-based Web company run by Kurt Andersen, former *Spy* and *New York* magazine editor, and Michael Hirschorn, former editor of *Spin*. Their lead product, *Inside.com*, launched this spring with part of the site available for free and deeper sections requiring paid subscription. *Inside.com* is aimed at a media-immersed audience looking for original reporting and analysis on the media, entertainment, publishing, and Internet businesses. Its all-star roster of journalists has been recruited from *The Wall Street Journal*, *Spin*, *Fortune*, *Brill's Content*, and similar prominent publications.

*Inside's* business model relies on the notion of producing, essentially, a high-quality online trade publication (though they disdain the term trade, preferring "b2b" instead). The company is betting that the executives who shell out hundreds of dollars for *Variety*, *Billboard*, and *Publishers Weekly* (again, expense accounts pick up the tab) are willing to add a pricey Webzine to their reading list if it provides timely, high-quality information. (A sneak preview sampler: TV: "Miffed Over FCC Decision, Fox Says It Will Sue"; Music: "If Napster Cuts a Deal, Then What?"; Books: "What They Want You To Read This Summer"). At the prices it is charging (\$19.95 a month, \$199 a year), *Inside.com* would only need to get subscribers in the tens of thousands to make a go of it.

It's far too early to gauge the success of *Inside.com*, but certainly the company's business plan did not scare off the private investors who put some \$28 million into the project prior to launch. If *Inside.com* survives, it may pioneer a workable paid model for the Web: aim for a very tightly defined niche, and emphasize high-quality journalism. ■

The Web —  
unlike magazines,  
newspapers, TV, or  
radio — has an  
essentially limitless  
capacity to eventually  
dilute advertising



James Ledbetter, *CJR's* new-media columnist, was recently named editor-in-chief of *The Industry Standard's* European edition. He is a former press critic for *The Village Voice* and the author of *Made Possible By — The Death of Public Broadcasting in the United States*.



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# Get Big, Sell Out, or Die

BY FRANK HOUSTON

**S**alon.com was born as an online magazine in 1995, when the Web was young and getting noticed was easier. A lot has changed in five years. Although it has earned a place as one of online journalism's most recognizable names, *Salon* now finds itself competing in a crowded field, operating under the pressures that come with being a public company in the digital economy. In early June, in fact, c.e.o. Michael O'Donnell announced that *Salon.com* had cut its operating budget for fiscal 2001 by about 20 percent. Cost cuts included laying off thirteen people, seven of them journalists, representing 15 percent of the editorial staff.

At the same time, *Salon.com* is under pressure to get large enough to survive in the new economy. Its choices seem to be: get big, get gobbled up, or get out of the game. So even as it shrinks its operating expenses, *Salon* it is trying to build up its brand of independent journalism with a literate flair. The new media content company is pushing into old media.

*Salon Radio*, a venture with the Dial, an online radio site was launched last year. *Salon* also recently acquired MP3LiT, which offers a literary twist on downloadable audio files — readings by and interviews with famous authors. "Most people have never heard the sound of James Joyce reading his work," says *Salon* founder, chairman, and editor David Talbot. Talbot splits his time between Silicon Alley in Manhattan and the site's home

office in San Francisco. *Salon*, he explains, is trying to capitalize on the faster connectivity that is beginning to reach many wired households that can handle audio and video content. "Broadband is the way the medium is developing," he says.

Talbot's independent media empire changed its name from *Salon Magazine* to *Salon.com* last year. He has emphasized that online content is just one of a panoply of *Salon* businesses. Broadband is another, as is electronic commerce: at *Salon*'s revamped gift shop, readers are enticed to buy everything from books to movies to night-vision goggles. And *Salon*'s own paperback compilations, like *Mothers Who Think*. The *Salon.com Reader's Guide to Contemporary Authors*, a Penguin publication due in August, will be available on the site as well as in bookstores.

Born in 1995, *Salon* took aim at what one of its executives recently classified as "the market that watches *Seinfeld*." It built a loyal audience. After the site unveiled a new design this spring, a deluge of criticism from passionate readers forced a re-design.

*Salon.com*'s online content now falls into a dozen categories (*Salon* calls them sites), from Books to News to the recently added Sex, Politics2000, and Business, which focuses on technology companies.

All of the site's content will figure into *SalonTV*, in development. *Salon*'s chief online rival, *Slate*, also reportedly has a TV show in development. *Slate*, too, is trying to grow. But since it's owned by Microsoft, the online magazine may have less to fear from stock valuations than *Salon*, which rose to \$15 shortly after going public in June 1999, but was around \$2 early this June.

"We get all these stories about 'Oh, their stock is down, David Talbot is not a zillionaire any more,' and the truth is we could give a shit about that," Talbot says. "We got into this to get more mastery of our work and to get more creative satisfaction out of it."

But other financial issues are vital for *Salon*, especially its revenue model, which, like that of most of the Web, is evolving. "Perhaps they are building a brand that will morph over time, but I have no idea how they're going to make money," says Lisa Napoli, MSNBC's Internet correspondent.

Talbot seems to have a plan. *Salon.com* now gets 90 percent of its revenue from advertising and sponsorships (long-term advertising tied to specific editorial material). Talbot wants to reduce the site's dependence on that income by increasing

## APB, 9:30 A.M., MONDAY, JUNE 5

**T**hat was when Marshall Davidson, c.e.o. of *APBnews.com*, walked into the newsroom and, through his tears, told some of the nation's best journalists that the money had run out. They would no longer be paid, and their Web site would no longer be the place to go for news and information about crime and safety. Many of *APB*'s 140 employees had left good jobs to join the dot-com revolution at a place that — journalistically, anyway — was doing it right. A number of them had won awards for their *APB* journalism, some just that week. As Hoag Levins, *APB*'s editor, put it: "These last two weeks have been some of the most ironic, bittersweet moments of my life."

At month's end, *APB* was talking to potential investors.

*continued on page 34*

# New Media May Be Old Media's Savior

BY ROBERT S. BOYNTON

In the last few years the conventional wisdom has been that the advent of the new media will hasten the demise of print.

That newspapers will die as readers get more information from the Internet; magazines will be overwhelmed by the proliferation of inexpensively-produced, niche-oriented sites and Webzines; bound books will be replaced by digitalized e-books. That the culture of print, in short, will soon be a thing of the past.

But I wonder whether this confuses the content with the attachment we have to a particular kind of container. In fact, a number of recent developments suggest that new media may actually be the salvation of old media; that online newspapers, Webzines, and e-books could preserve and extend the best aspects of the print culture while augmenting it with their various technological advantages. If this is true, then the future of old media is in embracing the new — a development we see most clearly with newspapers.

Newspapers have been spurred by a simple economic fact: more than a third of their revenue comes from classified advertising, which readily lends itself to searchable online listings. In a defensive move, newspapers quickly and heavily invested in such online sites as CareerPath.com, PowerAdz.com, AdOne, and Classified Ventures, and also use those companies for added exposure for national ads. Most have also put their own local classifieds online.

The Web sites, meanwhile, become a way to broaden and deepen the content base — newspapers are good at content — as well as a potential source of revenue, as home pages attract new advertisers and subscribers. Knight Ridder's Real Cities network (*RealCities.com*) is a good example. The portal site gets news from the chain's thirty-one dailies, as well as from Belo and Central newspapers, who are partners in the operation. And it features directories of community resources and businesses, classifieds, entertainment, shopping, free e-mail, community publishing, and search capability. Real Cities brought Knight Ridder \$31.4 million in revenue in 1999.

The *New York Times* is another. The paper's robust Web site has attracted 11.4 million registered non-paying readers (as of April, up 61.9 percent from a year earlier). In order to get access to the site, readers must offer up some basic personal data, which will eventually be used for direct marketing. By 1999 nearly half of those registered readers reported that they had never purchased a paper copy of the *Times*, which means that the online version was introducing the brand to an entirely new group. The Web presence also helps

the *Times*'s print circulation; the paper gained some 12,000 new subscribers via the site in the first half of 1999.

Other papers have gone further afield. *The Record*, in Hackensack, New Jersey, has created some 2,000 community-group Web pages on its

NJCommunity.com site, which are linked to the paper itself. The site has helped local groups build home pages to disseminate information and create conversations about everything from Cub Scouts to carpools.

As they embrace the Internet, the newspapers are beginning to blur the line between old and new media. With the introduction of so-called "inkless paper," the line will eventually become even harder to discern. E-Ink, a consortium funded by Hearst and Motorola, is developing a technology that manipulates a grid of microcapsules filled with blue ink and white paint chips enclosed between two sheets of rubbery plastic. When hit by an electric charge the chips float into place, creating words on a "page." With this, the daily paper would be downloaded from a computer or phone line. The consortium predicts that newspapers will start experimenting with these inkless, electronic papers in three years. If the aesthetics prove acceptable to newspaper readers, many trees could live fuller lives, and a lot of newspaper-company money will be saved.

**MAGAZINES** While most magazines have developed some online presence — reproducing the print version and adding searchable archives — few have taken full advantage of the Internet's capability to strengthen their brand. Condé Nast, for example, has decided to do very little with the river of editorial content it pours out every month.

By coming so slowly to the Web, magazines have ceded ground to Webzines. But there are exceptions. *Smart Money*, the joint effort of Dow Jones and Hearst, boasts an extremely rich and popular interactive financial site. *The Atlantic Monthly* created *Atlantic Unbound*, a stand-alone Webzine with an active reader's forum, its own lengthy interviews, features, and reviews, as well as the entire print magazine. Online since November 1993, *Atlantic Unbound* ([theatlantic.com](http://theatlantic.com)) has done a lot to rejuvenate the reputation of a magazine that is sometimes perceived as fusty. Among political journals of opinion, *National Review* has developed an excellent site ([nationalreview.com](http://nationalreview.com)) that is updated constantly and frequently breaks news that the print magazine's bi-weekly schedule makes difficult.

One intriguing development among Webzines took place this past April when *Nerve*, "the magazine of literate smut," started a

*continued on page 34*

## A PERSONAL VIEW

# News Isn't Always Journalism

BY KATHERINE FULTON

**T**he main event isn't technology. It's economic and social change. The Internet is not just another media delivery system, like television and radio before it. It's the catalyst for a historic transition from one era to another. As Peter Drucker wrote recently, it took about fifty years to get from the invention of the steam engine to the innovation of the train, which then accelerated the shift to an industrial age and abolished old notions of time and space. A similar process is under way with the Internet and e-commerce, which began to take off forty to fifty years into the computer age and accelerated the shift into a networked knowledge economy. The Internet (or what we now call the Internet) will slowly absorb every other communications medium over the next few decades, and abolish old notions of time and space yet again.

Already, the Internet is fueling what some call a Cambrian explosion of innovation. Some of these new species will simply add on functions (as the pager did to the telephone). Some will substitute functions (as television did to newspapers for breaking news). Others will completely transform the possibilities (as the telephone did when it replaced the telegraph). Every industry is changing, not just media; all are being reconfigured in ways indifferent to old boundaries of industry or nation.

As a consequence, journalism will become a smaller and smaller part of an ever-expanding global media and communications system. That system in turn will become the infosphere in which we live, play, and work. "Media" will be where we get news, get entertained, get educated, and get money. What used to be separate and distinct — the elements of a package called a newspaper or a television network or a university education — will be unbundled and seamlessly interwoven into the texture of our lives.

Though we're still in the embryonic stages of this shift, we can already get a sense of what it will mean for our old notions of news and news businesses. Take a look at MySchwab (<http://myschwab.excite.com>), for example. Here we have a money management company, in partnership with a new media player, Excite, giving me a place to integrate various kinds of information: "My Watch List" (for stocks I own), "My News," "My Weather," "My Sports," and "My Reminders" (for to-dos and birthdays). Soon to come might be displays of my routine bills and transactions, my medical records, my entire calendar, my favorite music, the latest photographs e-mailed from my niece and nephew, my journal, and live video of the traffic at key interchanges on my route to work.

In this environment, what matters is what my needs are

and how well they are met — not necessarily who meets them. People need banking, but they don't necessarily need banks. People need news and information of all kinds, but they don't necessarily need newspapers or TV as

we have known them.

News is not the same as journalism, certainly. It never has been. Newspapers and news broadcasts have always been full of plenty of nonjournalistic information, ads, and amusements that have nothing to do with original reporting or seasoned news judgment. But the journalists were used to working for institutions where it was easy to assume that news as they defined it was the main event.

In the new habitat, what we used to think of as "news," the kind journalists packaged, is inexorably becoming a mere add-on to the services offered by other businesses, such as Schwab or Encyclopedia Britannica.

The next step, I fear, is that many local news outlets will eventually become either smaller businesses, or essentially disappear, as they become features of national and international information businesses. For this reason, I have come to support what I would once have considered heresy: the relaxation of cross-ownership barriers in local media markets. Concentration of power in too few hands is a big worry. But the great monoliths of local journalism sit on eroding foundations. Profits will be driven down. Why? Basic headline news, provided by many players, has become ubiquitous, a commodity; the Net has trained people to expect things for free; competition from new players will increase. Good reporting is expensive. Good multimedia reporting, distributed in many different ways for many different purposes, will be even more expensive. Only healthy businesses will be able to pay for it. That means two types of winners: small and very focused, or large. Medium-sized players need not apply. Consolidation among general interest local news players is inevitable, and if it happens cross media, strong local media institutions may endure.

Journalism and journalists won't disappear. As purveyors of meaning and context amidst all the noise, they could become more essential than ever. Just because I can have a personalized, integrated interface to organize the information and communication I care about doesn't mean I won't also subscribe to a package of original reporting and analysis. Perhaps a traditional media organization, such as The New York Times Company, will supply it. Or perhaps not. There is nothing sacred about today's journalism institutions.

Smart journalists will support new forms of journalism (multimedia storytelling? interactive video shorts? more focus

*continued on page 35*

# Defining the Blurry Line Between Commerce and Content

BY TRACY MCNAMARA

**W**hen *Wall Street Journal* reporter Kara Swisher spoke at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism last year, she called online journalists "linkalists" — a joke, she insists, though some didn't find it funny. That may be because "linkalism" creates not only opportunities for new kinds of journalism but new challenges in setting and holding to journalistic standards, challenges that the world of new media is only beginning to wrestle with.

Online journalists say that most discussions about standards center on the relationship between content and commerce. "Those lines are blurrier than I'm comfortable with," Swisher says. Emerson College journalism professor Jerry Lanson agrees. "Often, issues about what is journalistic content become secondary," he says.

This spring the Online News Association, along with the Columbia University School of Journalism, created a new set of international awards for the best of Internet journalism. The awards are meant to encourage high standards. And they will also make an important distinction between the kinds of sites that include news. According to *TheStreet.com*'s Jamie Heller, an ONA board member, the organization has agreed that for a site to qualify for the award, "the primary purpose of the site has to be to inform, rather than to sell products." Some fear that the many new sites featuring news content as a sideline may find many new ways to blur standards.

But such blurring is possible on journalistic sites as well. New media create unique issues because of the possibilities in the technology. Sites not only put related advertising adjacent to articles, but they can embed advertising within an article. Either way, linking articles to commerce is far more immediate and powerful online. While a print advertisement requires you to visit a store to make a purchase, online you can simply move your wrist slightly to buy. "Just because you can make such links, doesn't mean you should," says Swisher.

Should *The New York Times* on the Web include a link to Barnes & Noble directly below a book review? Should *Newstream.com* sandwich a news report on Clinton's Memorial Day speech between a Ford press release and an advertisement for their own company? Should *Slate* magazine put a paid advertisement—labeled as such—in its list of the day's stories? Should Yahoo! FinanceVision pop up an advertising window when you research financial news through the Yahoo! site? Should *Salon's* online shop feature music CDs for sale through an online store that features *Salon's* own album reviews? Should *Time.com* review a Panasonic digital camera—complete with picture and price—with a link to Panasonic's online store?

It depends, journalists say. Rich Gordon, who headed *The Miami Herald's* online site for four years, says he is not necessarily troubled by commercial links embedded in news. "Consumers often want to be able to buy a book if they read a positive review," he says. "But of course, you can envision scenarios where this could be abused — if you only chose to review books that Amazon wanted, or if you didn't run negative reviews, for example."

Still, it is more difficult for readers to recognize the line between commerce and content online than in print. Visual clues have been developed over time in print; online, we are all learning them. For this reason disclosure is essential, according to Rich Jaroslovsky, managing editor of *The Wall Street*

*continued on page 35*

## RULES TO LINK BY

*As the conversation about online journalism standards warms up, some outlets and organizations are putting their standards into writing. Many of these rules would apply to journalism in any medium, but others are aimed at the challenges of the new technology: Some samples:*

### From APBnews.com:

**News Separate from Commerce:** Editorial content will always be distinct from commercial materials. Advertisements, commercial announcements, e-commerce promotions, and marketing materials will never appear in the newshole in a way that would allow viewers to mistake them for news content.

**Full Disclosure:** APBnews.com will fully disclose its journalistic practices. It will also disclose any APBnews.com business relationships that are relevant to the public's understanding or perception of our journalistic credibility.

### From CNET.com

CNET labels content to indicate the source in cases where the information published was not generated by CNET's editorial staff.

### From the Online News Association's mission statement:

**Editorial Integrity:** The unique permeability of Web publications allows for the linking and joining of information resources of all kinds as intimately as if they were published by a single organization. Responsible journalism on the Internet means that the distinction between news and other information must always be clear, so that individuals can readily distinguish independent editorial information from paid promotional information and other non-news.

# Dot-Com Dreams,

## I. BRAIN DRAIN JUST A LEAK NOW

BY ANNE COLAMOSCA

**T**he shadow of a shakeout is beginning to appear in the journalistic corner of the dot-com world. A year ago, traditional journalism seemed almost old hat, not *Red Hat*. But after the Nasdaq began a sickening slide back March 10, after it deepened in May, the dot-com landscape suddenly seemed full of blind alleys.

"In the wee small hours of the morning, it starts to grab. Will I be out on the street next week? Will I be able to make it back to the safety I left behind?" That's what a journalist who left a traditional media company for the Web recently told his friend, a midwestern magazine editor. Migrants to the Web in all fields are a bit nervous these days, but reporters and editors appear to have particular cause for concern, since a business model that promises profits for dot-com journalism has yet to be found. Some independent dot-com companies seem to be burning through their investors' capital at a rapid rate. Even at most sites put up by large media companies, profits remain elusive.

"There's a definite change from a year ago, when job-hopping from old media to new media probably peaked," says Dan Rohn, a former *Washington Post* copy editor who founded JournalismJobs.com, which lists jobs in both old and new media. "Since then, old media companies have given stock options and increased benefits and salaries. Veteran staff people are, in many cases, sitting still."

Still, JournalismJobs.com has seen "the number of dot-com jobs fluctuate widely . . . often reflecting the swings of the stock market," Rohn says. To be sure, the dot-coms are still hungry. At Columbia University's School of Journalism, thirty-six dot-com companies took part in the year 2000 annual "job fair," up from six the year before. And they tended to offer higher salaries than other outlets, according to Melanie Huff, the school's career services coordinator.

Meanwhile, at some sites, a hunt is under way for established journalists with something resembling star quality. "In the entertainment field, which I cover, the dot-coms are going after high-profile journalists with established contacts who could serve as rainmakers," says Robert Levine, a senior editor at *New York* magazine who formerly worked at *HotWired*, an online publication. "The dot-coms very much need these people right now to help raise venture capital money."

TURNING POINT

But on the whole it's getting somewhat harder for the Web to drain experienced brains. "Right now, I would be strongly disinclined to go back to an Internet job," says *New York*'s Levine. "The whole Internet world is very cyclical and we seem to be going into a down cycle right now. I very much liked what I did online. But it's nice to be back in traditional media, where you can at least keep chaos at bay."

Other journalists point out that corporate media giants offer safety, good salaries, and huge opportunities these days. "At Time Warner there are so many new projects being developed internally, as a result of the proposed AOL merger," says Adam Stoltman, who until recently was a feature photography editor at *Sports Illustrated*. "My sense is that staffers are not looking very hard at the independent dot-com world right now. There are too many things going on at Time." On his very popular *MediaNews* site ([poynter.org/medianews](http://poynter.org/medianews)), Jim Romanesko reported in May that three *Fortune* writers recently turned down jobs at *Line56.com*, a financial site — offers said to be at least \$50,000 above their Time Warner salaries.

Despite signs of a dot-com slowdown, few journalists are wishing aloud for a pre-Internet world. The "good old days" were marked by stagnant wages and limited opportunities. The last few years have seen solid wage growth and an unprecedented, vibrant cross-pollination of editorial work on the Internet, magazines, cable TV stations, and newspapers.

And the Web still gives rise to dreams of independence and quality. This May, Adam Stoltman left his *Sports Illustrated* job to manage his own photojournalism-heavy site, *Journal E* ("Real Stories From Planet Earth"). He and a partner, Alan Dorow, spent four years developing it.

"We've watched the mania, and the venture capital money pour into dot-coms in huge amounts, and now see some of the mania on the downside," Stoltman says. "Our strategy has been to move cautiously like the tortoise and develop content we really love." That's a strategy that remains open to journalists almost no matter what happens to venture capital flows or the Nasdaq. ■

*Anne Colamosca's last piece for CJR was about the increasing use of stock options in the news business, in the May/June issue. She is a former Business Week staff writer and co-author, with William Wolman, of The Judas Economy.*



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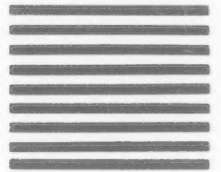
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# Dot-Com Doubts

## II. WEIGHING THE JOB CHOICES

BY BRENT CUNNINGHAM

**F**resh out of journalism school, Kirstin Blakeley had job offers from an Internet start-up and *Forbes* magazine. The dot-com, which hadn't launched yet, paid more, came with a tantalizing options package, and gave her more responsibility (she would be managing the site's reporters and editors in addition to writing her own stories). *Forbes*, of course, is a known quantity, financially secure, and has a growing Web operation of its own. Decisions, decisions.

Blakeley's father suggested she check out the dot-com's backers. Were they reputable? What was their track record in the Internet economy? She did, and was underwhelmed by what she found. Blakeley now works as a reporter at *Forbes*. "I think I made the right decision," she says, "particularly with the turmoil that has happened since in the Internet world. I don't worry about where *Forbes* will be in six months."

The Internet is not going away, and it's not as though venture capitalists have closed their wallets completely. It's just that now there's more talk of the need to look before you leap. "These days, as a prospective employee, you have less reason to be unrealistic," says Rich Gordon, who now heads the new media program at Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism after running the *Miami Herald's* Web operation the last four years. The new, new thing is never a sure thing. But journalists who know the online world say there are ways to make your dot-com job hunt less of a crapshoot, both in terms of discerning the financial health of a start-up and its commitment to journalism.

First, they say, be a good reporter. Ask questions. Who works there? Are they experienced journalists, or primarily folks from a marketing or techie background? Who will be your immediate boss? Who is that person's boss? "Wherever you end up, you want to be surrounded by mentors," says Erin Joyce, who recently moved from *Future Banker*, a print magazine in the *American Banker* family, to *internet.com*, a site that covers the Internet industry. Paul Grabowicz, director of new media at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, says having veteran editors running the news side of a dot-com is more important than the company's financial strength. "At least then when some of the dicey things that go on at dot-coms as far as mixing journalism and marketing happen, you'll have someone who knows what the rules are," he says. "And you'll learn something."

Get a full and unambiguous description of what will be expected of you. The title of "reporter" does not always mean

the same thing at a dot-com as it does at a newspaper. You may be required to know HTML and code your own stories. You might even be asked to work closely with advertisers and marketers. "Jobs are not as well-defined as in traditional media," says Gordon. "If you are interested in simply being a reporter, there are a lot of dot-com jobs that won't be appropriate. And where you draw the line is gray area." Stephen Lucey, a former pension fund manager who just graduated from Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, says he applied for an allegedly journalistic job described as "senior writer" at a Silicon Valley start-up only to find that it was actually a corporate communications job.

On the business side, you can follow Blakeley's lead and check out the investors, see if they have a reputation for doing their homework. If the dot-com has gone public or has filed to go public, you can scour the Securities and Exchange Commission documents. You can talk to analysts and to people who have left the company, and read what the trade publications have written about your prospective employer.

**C**ompany officials probably won't give you a copy of their business plan, but they ought to be able to tell you enough about it to allow you to make an informed decision. Does it seem to make sense? Ask to meet with business side representatives as well as the editorial folks. What is the burn rate? How much money do they have left in the bank? Are there enough employees to do the work? What's the turnover rate? If people are constantly coming and going, why? What is the long-term plan to make a profit? "If you're told the bulk of their income will come from manufacturers who want to promote their products on the site, you should definitely ask questions about whether aggressive coverage of those manufacturers will be encouraged," says Gordon.

There are no guarantees, of course. But for today's young reporters, a degree of instability may not be a problem. "This generation seems to be more agile, more able to live with the instability," says Grabowicz of his students. "Of course, we are at an odd confluence of unprecedented economic expansion and the explosion of new media. If there is a real economic downturn, things might change. If there aren't twenty other dot-coms waiting to snatch you up, the prospects of your employer succeeding may matter more."

*Brent Cunningham is an assistant editor at CJR.*

## New Media

*continued from page 29*

interested in a print edition as well. Produced inexpensively in-house and distributed only through bookstores, the 50,000 paper copies of *Nerve* sold well, and may have set a precedent for an economic method for launching new magazines.

**BOOKS** Of all the varieties of print culture, book publishing is surely the least efficient and most outdated. Despite advances in management, roughly 30 percent of the books are still returned to publishers, for a full discount, by bookstores. With rising paper and storage costs, publishers are extremely eager to embrace technology that will transform their industry from a "heavy gravity" to a "zero gravity" business. The answer is digitized books — whether distributed as "e-books" or published in small runs by print-on-demand (POD) machines, and the race is now on among major publishing houses to invest in such technology. St. Martin's Press has already said it will eventually release every title in both print and digital form.

Aside from enriching the culture, the economic opportunities created by POD are enormous. In the future, there may be no such thing as an "out of print" book. About 90,000 books go out of print every year, and if even a small number of these

paper counterpart, one of the first such "reverse launches." The idea for an offline version grew out of research that found that nearly two-thirds of the Webzine's 2.8 million users said they were

titles were stored digitally in order to be printed as needed, publishers could recover a significant stream of lost revenue.

**A**lthough it is too early to predict precisely what will emerge from the collision of new and old media, there are several indications that the encounter will be far more beneficial than was once thought. In the future, most magazines and newspapers will probably lead double lives: the paper product driving readers to the Internet site, and vice versa. And the lines between these media will blur, with each form functioning according to its strengths. A Web site might handle short, quick news, for example, with longer features left for the newspaper or magazine. In the future, lengthy nonfiction journalism might be distributed by Web sites in digitalized form, then printed using POD technology.

Old media has an advantage it must nourish: credibility. In the midst of the Monica Lewinsky scandal the worry among many journalists was that the likes of Matt Drudge would set the standard in the future. But although newspapers have embraced Drudge's Internet, they seem to have realized that their strength is in sticking to old values — distinguishing fact from rumor, acting as elite authenticators of information.

Now that new media has provided a level field, old media has a unique opportunity to play on it. ■

*Robert S. Boynton, a visiting professor of journalism at New York University, has written for The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, The Atlantic Monthly, and Lingua Franca.*



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**3M Innovation**

## Salon

*continued from page 28*

such revenue streams as syndication (especially overseas) and licensing of *Salon* content, as well as personal ads (including romantic matchmaking) and audio downloads like those from MP3LiT. Still, the cost of doing business online is going up, at least by one significant measure. When *Salon* rented space on an AOL channel in 1999, the fee ran to \$250,000. Talbot confirms reports that the price rose to the "mid-seven-figures" for a new two-year deal. It was not renewed. "A lot of companies will be hurt by these excessive fees," Talbot says.

Will *Salon* preserve its treasured independence in this evolving universe? Talbot says yes, but with a caveat. Although he has referred to AOL Time Warner three times during our conversation as an 800-pound gorilla, he decides to change his metaphor. "If the whales displace so much of the water" that it alters the ecosystem of the Web, he says, *Salon* "may have to sell out." He quickly adds, "but only to survive." ■

— Frank Houston

## The Nature of "News"

continued from page 30

on breaking news on the Web?). They'll embrace new functions, such as facilitating good online conversations, organizing archival resources, and aggregating and repackaging reporting from many sources.

But look at journalism's older assets. Original reporting, vetted by great editors to meet standards of credibility and accuracy, is different from other breeds of information. "Information is anything that can be copied, and the Internet is the world's largest copy machine," digital commentator Kevin Kelly said in a session I attended not long ago. "What becomes valuable is what can't be copied — trust, attention, integrity, relationship, brand." Wise journalists will find ways to explain and market such assets, both inside their institutions and outside, to the public they serve. They'll also work to reinterpret those old values for a new era, to find new ways of winning trust, maintaining integrity, attracting attention. That's the tricky part: knowing what to hold onto and what to let go. ■

Katherine Fulton ([fulton@gbn.org](mailto:fulton@gbn.org)), the founding editor of North Carolina's alternative weekly, *The Independent*, has written twice for CJR about the impact of technology on journalism, in 1993 ("Future Tense") and 1996 ("Journalism.now"). She now works for Global Business Network in California, helping clients figure strategies for the future.

## Commerce and Content

continued from page 31

*Journal's* Web site. "The real issue is whether or not these sites are playing fair with their users," he says, "by making clear when content is really an advertisement." Les Blatt, managing editor of *Newstream.com* says, "It's largely a matter of making clear where the information on your site comes from."

Blatt says that all of the information on his site clearly states where it comes from — including information from public relations companies. The troubled *APBnews.com* has been labeling all advertisements with the word "advertising" printed alongside each one. Fred Mann, former general manager of *Philly.com*, Knight Ridder's Philadelphia site, says that information on his site often runs with a disclaimer if it is not fact-checked by the staff. "I don't think at this time you'll find sites that are crystal clear on this," says Mann. "But I think as we go along, there will be more labels."

Most online journalists have a print background, and bring their sense of print-world ethics — or lack of ethics — with them. "The Web magnifies bad ethics," says Columbia University journalism professor Steve Ross, "But it doesn't create bad ethics."

"The rules haven't changed," says Bruce Koon, a regional vice-president of KnightRidder.com. "Credibility is actually a driver of traffic." ■

Tracy McNamara is an assistant editor at CJR.

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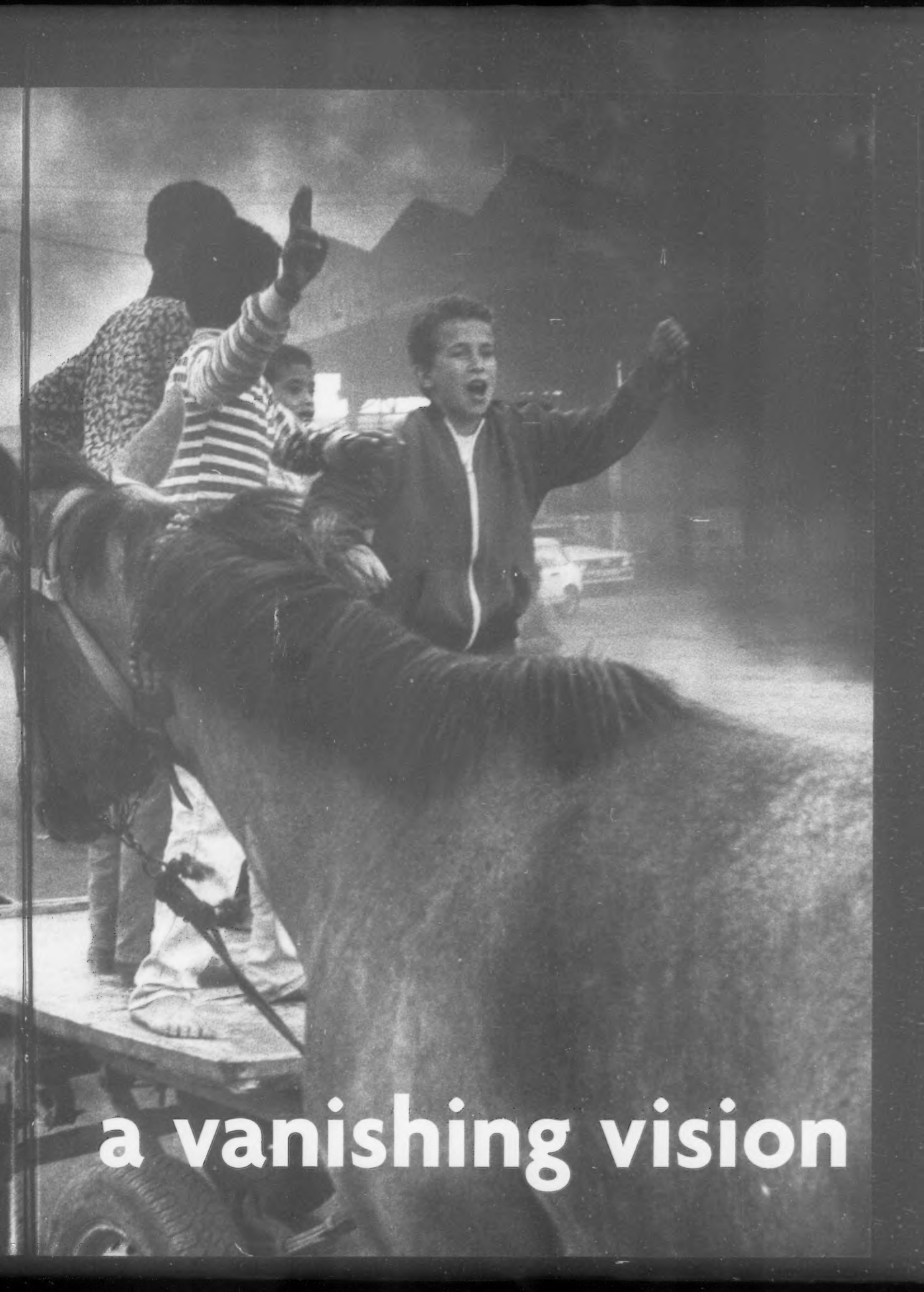
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**a vanishing vision**

# a vanishing vision

*with celebrity coverage dominating the contemporary global media marketplace, classic photo-journalism is fading away*

BY RUSSELL MILLER

There was a time, not too long ago, when magazines interested in what was happening in the world routinely commissioned writers and photographers to work together on assignments.

Through the '70s and '80s, when I was contributing regularly to *The Sunday Times Magazine* in London, it was a rare event not to work with a photographer. The unspoken agreement within the partnership was that each would help the other, but not interfere. I never suggested what pictures the photographer should take; similarly I did not expect him or her to suggest what questions I should ask.

I did not in the least mind helping to hump equipment, tripods and camera bags and the like, or getting up at some ungodly hour to catch the light. All I asked in return was that the photographer would sit patiently, mouth firmly shut, while I was conducting interviews.

By and large, the system worked extremely well and many of the photographers with whom I criss-crossed the world were not just good companions but became good friends, too. I remember being in Moscow, at the height of the cold war, with a British photographer named Tony Evans. It was virtually impossible to get served within an hour at any of the city's restaurants, but it mattered less to us than the other diners because on the first night Tony pro-

duced from his bag a full-sized Scrabble set. We usually got at least three or four games in before the first course arrived.

The result of our endeavors, and those of similar writer/photographer teams working for Sunday broadsheet magazines in Europe and the United States, was known as photo-journalism — a melding of mutually supportive words and pictures designed to explain, illuminate, or perhaps expose what was happening at home and abroad. Our brief was to extend the news, to take a more considered look at a story. For the writer the challenge was to put together what appeared to be an authoritative and definitive version of an event; for the photographer the challenge was to produce a fresh, cohesive picture essay that would add significant visual impact to previously published news pictures.

The range of subjects was infinite and, to me, infinitely interesting, whether it was a war on the far side of the world, a social crisis at home, or an opportunity to look into unusual lives of other people. In those golden days of photo-journalism there were no limits. If the pictures were good enough, they could be spread over twelve, fourteen, twenty or more pages. If the story was interesting enough, it could run to almost any length. One of the longest features *The Sunday Times Magazine* ever published was 18,000 words, written by me, about the suffering of a family whose children were taken away after a mistaken diagnosis of sexual abuse.

At that time it seemed inconceivable that classic photo-journalism would ever lose its luster. How could such stories ever not be interesting? How wrong I was.

The rot set in in the early '90s with

the rise of "life-style" journalism and the burgeoning cult (curse?) of the celebrity. The success of *People* magazine in the middle market, and *Vanity Fair* at the glossy end, prompted editors to question the commercial, if not the moral, relevance of photo-journalism. Would readers rather look at pictures of a famine in Africa, or the inside of Madonna's new home? Hmm, tricky. Would readers prefer an interview with Leonardo DiCaprio to an exposé of corruption in the Soviet Union or infanticide in China? Well, maybe.

One magazine after another began shifting the emphasis of their coverage away from photo-journalism towards interviews with the rich and famous. This trend took no consideration at all of the fact that celebrity journalism is fundamentally flawed, since it assumes that every celebrity has something interesting to say. Why? Add to this the pernicious influence of press agents not only calling the shots about what questions can and cannot be asked but demanding picture approval, and the notion that this exercise resembles journalism becomes increasingly ludicrous.

Even *Life* magazine, in its final tortured reincarnation, embraced celebrity journalism in a vain attempt to stay in business, but the competition was too great. In its final issue, with nothing to lose, it made a last stab at serious photo-journalism by running a photo essay by James Nachtwey about a poor family eking out an existence in a shack by the railroad tracks in Jakarta, Indonesia. Nachtwey, whose usual beat is war, was so affected by the family's plight that he set up a small trust fund to help them.

**PHOTOS BY MAGNUM:** MOST OF THE PICTURES ON THESE PAGES ARE FROM THE TRAVELING EXHIBIT, "MAGNUM, OUR TURNING WORLD: PHOTOGRAPHS 1989-1999," SHOWN RECENTLY AT THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

Preceding page: LARRY TOWELL. Gaza City/1993. Innocence caught in the midst of Israeli-Palestinian conflict.  
Right: CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS. Somalia/1992. Mother nurses child as famine and war plague African nation.





Readers of *Life* poured in thousands of dollars and the family's life is now transformed.

This is a small, but moving, example of the power of photo-journalism. Now consider the essential worth of an interview with a movie star promoting his or her latest film, or an author trying to sell his new book, or a musician with an album coming out.

"The rise of celebrity journalism is the worst thing to have happened to our business," says David Burnett, co-founder of Contact Press Images. "It is getting more and more difficult to find space for serious stories. Mainstream magazines are still

publishing some photo-journalism, but it's no more than tokenism. Whenever there is an opportunity to see some celebrity at home, that's where they want to go."

Editors have been able to offer spurious justification for turning away from photo-journalism by claiming that the huge increase in the speed and scope of television newsreel coverage of world events made covering the same stories in the print media irrelevant. This is comparing chalk with cheese. A thirty-second bite on an evening newscast about a story that will be forgotten in twenty-four hours is hardly likely to provide

much genuine understanding about what is going on, or help us appreciate the feelings of the people involved. Good photo-journalism can fulfill both roles.

The Vietnam war laid bare the relative strengths of each medium. At that time, no war in history had been more extensively covered by television cameras, yet the images that endure are almost entirely black and white still pictures: Don McCullen's shell-shocked GI with terrible staring eyes focused on some private hell; the little girl running along a dusty road with her clothes burned off; the police chief shooting a suspected informer in the head; and the memorable work of Philip

JOHN VINK. Sudan/1988. Nomads in their own country, south Sudanese look for safe shelter.

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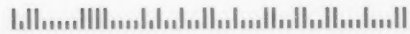
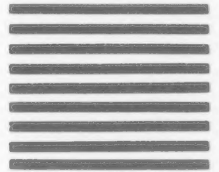
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Jones Griffiths, whose book, *Vietnam Inc.*, had such a devastating effect on the American perception of the war.

More recently, what picture will best sum up the long-running custody battle over Elián González, the little Cuban boy rescued from the sea off Florida? Certainly no television sequence will ever be able to compete with the single image of the terrified boy cowering in a closet as the door is wrenched open by an armed federal officer in full riot gear. It was taken by an enterprising AP photographer, Alan Diaz, who jumped over the garden fence and ran into the house with the feds. The picture went round the world, instantly became a martyr's icon in Miami's Little Havana and a strong contender for a Pulitzer for journalistic enterprise.

All this notwithstanding, it is the camera crews who rule the roost out in the field, as any reporter will tell you. Last month I was in the Philippines, working on a piece about the "Love Bug" computer virus, which had raced around the world and temporarily disabled millions of computers, including a number at the Pentagon and the CIA. When it was learned that the student suspected of unleashing the bug was due to make an appearance at a press conference in his lawyer's office in downtown Manila, the media scrum that resulted clearly demonstrated the new hierarchy. Ranged in a curve directly in front of the lawyer's desk were the tripods of twelve television crews, who had staked out their territory an hour earlier. When the student and his lawyer arrived, those still photographers present were obliged to try and shoot between, below or above the television cameramen, but always from behind. Correspondents like me were reduced to standing on chairs at the back of the room and shouting questions over the heads of the television crews.

I was not in the Philippines with a photographer, of course, because that is not the way photo-journalism works any more. Today magazines tend either to commission writers and pick up archive or agency pictures after the feature has been delivered, or they will buy a set of pictures from a photographer and assign a writer to put a story together, often by simply interviewing the photographer. The result is inevitable: either the words are weak, or the pictures are.

It is a far cry from the old days, but then few editorial budgets these days stretch to dispatching writer-photographer teams around the world, always with the risk that a story won't stand up or will prove to be unattainable.

When Michael Rand, the inspired art director of *The Sunday Times Magazine*, retired in the early '90s, it was rumored that some \$1.5 million worth of unpublished photographs languished in the magazine's filing cabinets. To the bean counters, this was nothing short of a scandal, but to journalists it was clear evidence of the magazine's quality: Rand adamantly refused to countenance using pictures that did not measure up to his high standards.

Today the market for traditional photo-journalism has shrunk to such an extent that few photographers, even those accepted as members of Magnum, the world's most prestigious photo agency, are able to make a living exclusively from journalism. Many undertake high-paying

corporate work to finance what they call "personal projects" — the kind of in-depth photo essays that once would have made their debut in magazines. Increasingly, they are today to be found in innumerable Web sites on the Internet and in online publications like *The Digital Journalist*, founded by *Time's* White House photographer, Dirck Halstead, whose oft-repeated mantra is that "photo-journalism as we know it is dead."

"With the arrival of the World Wide Web," Halstead wrote in a recent editorial, "we are only beginning to comprehend the implications for visual storytellers. Empowerment is at hand, and it will allow the photo-journalist to transcend the current marketplace, whether it is in newspapers, magazines, or even television networks."

**T**his is all very well except that I have never yet met a photographer who would prefer to have his work published on the Web rather than in a magazine. At least to the extent that today's technology allows, reproductions of photographs on a computer monitor cannot compete with print for quality and it is extraordinarily difficult to tell an unfolding story on a Web site in the way it can be accomplished by turning the pages of a well laid-out magazine.

To further complicate the future for photo-journalists, the subject that once would have guaranteed editorial space — war — is getting more and more difficult to cover. Military planners have learned well the lessons of Vietnam and the danger of giving photographers and reporters unfettered access to the front line, lest they should take an overtly critical line. President Nixon gloomily concluded that the Vietnam war was "the first in our history during which our media were more friendly to our enemies than to our allies." It was not true. What was true was that the media, after some hesitation — pictures of the massacre at My Lai were not published until a year after the event — decided that its duty was to show the American people the terrible price that was being paid to try and curb the spread of Communism in that far away country.

After Vietnam, there would be no more hitching helicopter rides from fire-fight to fire-fight. Control of the media became the byword and "spin" the means of ensuring favorable coverage. In the Persian Gulf war, no photographers were allowed on the front line. The first meaningful pictures to emerge from the gulf were taken after the war had



ended and the Iraqis were in full flight. In Bosnia and Kosovo the situation was so confused and the Allied "spin" so misleading that few newspapers or magazines were able to report accurately about what was going on. Only now do we know, for example, that Allied claims about the efficacy of the air campaign in Kosovo were grossly exaggerated.

So war correspondents and photographers now have to deal with an added menace — the propaganda machines churning away on both sides of any conflict. James Nachtwey, probably the most experienced and successful war photographer in the world, admits that bureaucratic restrictions are making the job more difficult, but he has never had a moment's doubt that the risks are worth taking.

"If you have convictions about being a journalist and you have convictions about the events you get involved in as a journalist, sometimes you are required to put your life on the line. You never do it recklessly. I have taken a lot of risks, I have had a lot of close calls, but I have never gone out there with sheer abandon and put myself in danger for the

sake of it. It was always for the sake of trying to communicate something."

Reuters correspondent Kurt Schork and AP cameraman Miguel Gil Morena, both killed in an ambush in Sierra Leone on May 25, passionately believed in the need to communicate the horrors of war to people, far away, who might otherwise feel uninvolved. Schork covered the entire war in Bosnia with impressive courage, but understood there were times when journalists should stop working and start helping. An unforgettable newsreel sequence showed him in Sarajevo leaping to the assistance of a woman badly injured by shrapnel, but while he was trying desperately to bind the woman's terrible injuries it was clear a photographer was shooting pictures, as, indeed, was the television cameraman. I do not find this shocking.

War photographers are often accused of capitalizing on human suffering, of being more interested in getting pictures of horror than in the horror itself. None with whom I have worked fit into that description. I was not with my friend Paul Lowe in Rwanda a few years back, but I'll

never forget the story he told me on his return. He had come across a camp packed with hundreds of Hutu refugees. There was suddenly some shooting, then panic, then a stampede. When it was all over, Lowe found himself looking at a field strewn with corpses. Many of the babies who had been strapped to their mothers' backs were still alive. Lowe began picking up the babies and carrying them back to the compound. Eventually an aid worker told him not to bring any more because they could not cope. At that point he had a baby in each arm. All he could do was put them down on the ground at the entrance to the camp and leave them. He can only assume they must have died.

It is hardly any wonder that war photographers feel most keenly aggrieved by the fact that the market for their work is diminishing year by year. There is, in truth, little point in risking your life to take pictures if those pictures are never published. ■

*Russell Miller is a writer in England. His ten books include, most recently, Magnum: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History.*

Above: LARRY TOWELL. Mexico/1994. Mennonite women in Durango caught in a windstorm.  
Upper right: MARTINE FRANCK. Nepal/1996. A playful moment at Tibetan monastery in Bodnath.  
Right: ELI REED. California/1992. Ruined stores are guarded following riot after Rodney King verdict.

# magnum at 50

by Neil Hickey

It all began innocently enough at a luncheon at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1947. Robert Capa, the wildly adventurous, poker-playing, womanizing Hungarian-born photo-journalist and a few globetrotting colleagues met to lay the groundwork for — what would become over the next half-century — the world's greatest photo agency. Capa, along with the Frenchman Henri Cartier-Bresson, a Polish Jew named David Szymin (called "Chim"), and the Briton George Rodger were the founding members of Magnum Photos, a rowdy brotherhood of misfits, malcontents, and flamboyant semi-geniuses who collectively have produced much of photo-journalism's most dramatic images.

While on assignment during the Spanish Civil war, Capa first began thinking about a cooperative photo agency that would give its members the freedom to choose their own assignments and, even more important, to keep their negatives and retain the copyright of their pictures. It was a revolutionary notion. An editor at the time called it "the most sensible idea in the history of photography," and declared that it turned "photographers in servitude into free artists."

Around that same time, the clunky, heavy Speed Graphic was giving way to the classic 35mm Leica, a boon to battlefield photographers. High-class picture magazines — in that blissful pre-television era — were finding mass audiences: *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* and the *Munchner Illustrierte Presse* in Germany; *Regards* and *Vu* in France; *Picture Post* in Britain, and *Life* in the U.S. Magnum eventually



opened offices in London, Paris, Tokyo, and New York.

The picture editor of *Ladies Home Journal* was an occasional visitor to the Paris office: "If one came early," he said, "one might be greeted by a sleepy photographer emerging from the back bedroom, and perhaps his girlfriend." The refrigerator was jammed full of film. Cardboard boxes of prints and contact sheets lined the living room, floor to ceiling. Luggage, laundry, and camera cases were strewn about. "A vague tone of

conspiracy prevailed at the long editing table, except when Robert Capa came roaring in. How he loved to disrupt the calm!"

As Russell Miller reports in his 1997 book on Magnum, the agency eventually became home to a rotating cohort of some of the world's greatest photographers: Elliott Erwitt, Eugene Smith, Sebastiao Salgado, Philip Jones Griffith, Dennis Stock, Rene Burri, Burt Glinn, Bruce Davidson. (A superb photo exhibition marking Magnum's 50th anniversary closed recently at the New-York Historical Society.)

But it is Capa whose spirit pervades Magnum to this day: friend of Hemingway, Steinbeck, Picasso, Irwin Shaw, John Huston, Humphrey Bogart, lover of Ingrid Bergman. In 1954, he raced to Indochina to cover the final days of French occupation after the battle of Dienbienphu. Capa stepped on an anti-personnel mine and died at age forty, the first U.S. correspondent killed in the war.

Hemingway sent a note from Madrid: "He was a good friend and a great and very brave photographer. It is bad luck for everybody that the percentages caught up with him....He was so much alive that it is a long hard day to think of him as dead." ■



# pictures from hell

## james nachtwey's photojournalism

BY JOHN KIFNER

James Nachtwey came by my apartment one evening last winter with an early copy of his new book, *Inferno*. It is a big black thing, beautifully printed, and he settled down on the sofa, sipping at a beer, as I painstakingly studied every one of the 382 searing photographs. Finally, after several hours, I closed it shut.

"Jim, this is awful," I said. "This is a terrible book."

"Oh, thank you," he said in his quiet voice.

Nachtwey knew exactly what I meant. He is a war photographer, arguably the best of his time, but he prefers to call himself an "anti-war photographer." He is one of a small, dwindling, band of photographers — Chris Morris and the Turnley brothers come immediately to mind — who make their living traveling from troublespot to troublespot, hellhole to hellhole.

I first met Nachtwey in Beirut in 1981, when he was just beginning his odyssey. The cover photo he shot for my story in *The New York Times Magazine* on life among the ruins of that once-fabulous city showed a civilian cradling an AK-47 rifle in his sandbagged doorway, his two daughters peeking out behind him. Since then we have worked together in Afghanistan, the West Bank, Haiti, Romania, and other garden spots. Nachtwey has maintained a diet of solid strife for going on twenty years now: Salvador, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Indonesia.

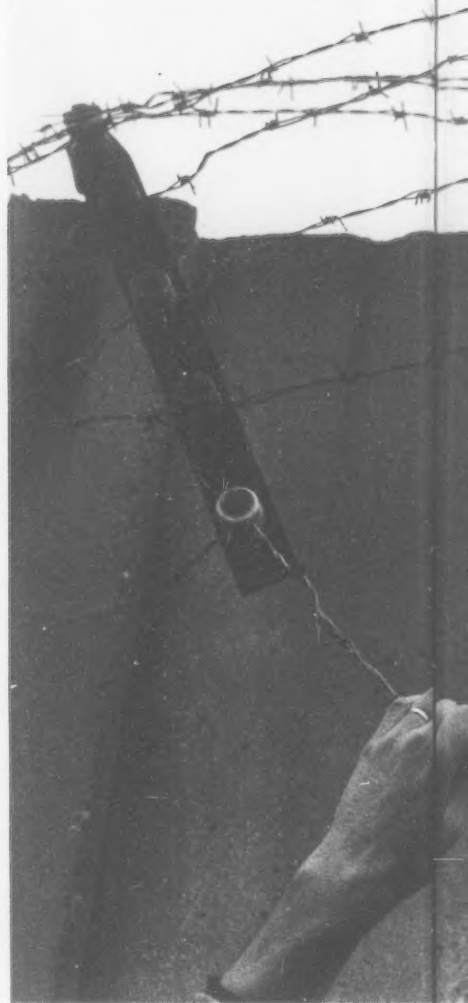
Legend has it that when Alfred Eisenstaedt was asked the secret of his success, the great photographer replied: "f8 and be there." Meaning the aperture with the optimum balance of speed and depth of field for quick focusing, and, above all, being on the spot with a swift and sure eye. Robert Capa said that if your pictures are not good enough, you're not close enough. That is Nachtwey. A

reporter, for the most part, is able to recover something he might have missed, get a fill from a colleague, a favor that will be returned on another day. Not so a photographer. You either get the shot or you don't. The great photographers have an uncanny sense of how a story is developing and where they should go. At breakfast, the photographer's table, laden with gear, is always the most tense as the shooters try to figure out where they should be. And it is a wise reporter who will accept an invitation to go along for the ride.

Then there is the eye.

What is most striking about Nachtwey's work — other than the sheer power of its subject matter — is the sense of composition, its almost painterly quality. It is an incredible performance, considering that many of the pictures are shot on the fly in the heat of combat. Yet they capture not only the exact moment — an exploding car in Belfast hurtling through the air as a man throwing a Molotov cocktail at a British armored vehicle balances on the toes of his right foot in follow through — but achieve a coherent whole as a work of art. Indeed, there was sometimes a feeling when Nachtwey was shooting in color that the pictures were almost *too* pretty, that the overall effect of his mastery of technique might detract from the horror of the subject. Admittedly this is somewhat of a quibble in a set of work consisting largely of dead bodies and shell-shocked survivors. Look at the eyes of the people in the pictures.

But Nachtwey in recent years has turned almost entirely to black and white photography. The more austere medium perfectly suits his strict moral vision, forcing the viewer to confront man's inhumanity in the last, post-cold war decade of the century. These are the photographs in *Inferno*. There is death in Chechnya and the harsh rule of the Taliban in



Afghanistan, but famine in Africa presents perhaps the most agonizing pictures with a man so starved he looks like a bundle of sticks crawling toward an aid station and a bulldozer burying piles of bones that had once been people.

After Dartmouth, Nachtwey taught himself photography and honed his craft for four years at the *Albuquerque Journal* until he felt he was ready. Other photographers have shot Nachtwey at work, crouching in gunfire on a street in South Africa his camera to his eye while all around him are soldiers and photographers hugging the ground. He

Above: Berlin/1989. Pulling down the wall. Right: Bosnia/1993. A family grieves at a soldier's funeral. Nachtwey's photos can be seen at the International Center of Photography in New York through July 23.



has won every major photography award, most of them several times over. He has also put down his cameras and carried starving infants to aid stations or helped evacuate wounded soldiers. Above all, he feels himself driven, on a mission, almost religious really, to make people see what is happening in all the dirty little corners of the world.

"If I can upset people, if I can ruin their day," Nachtwey says. "If I can make them see there is something unacceptable going on, then I have done my job." ■

*John Kifner is a New York Times reporter who covers local, national, and foreign stories. In recent years he has worked in Beirut, Bosnia, and Kosovo.*



# **41<sup>st</sup>** annual John Swett **Awards for Media Excellence**

The California Teachers Association is proud to honor the winners of the 1999 John Swett Awards for Media Excellence. These awards recognize individual journalists, publications and stations for their dedication to excellence in covering education.

- ♦ **Nanette Asimov**, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, for a Feature Story
- ♦ **Anna Gorman**, *The Los Angeles Times*, for a Feature Story
- ♦ **Julian Guthrie**, *The San Francisco Examiner*, for a Feature Story and for a Series on a Single Subject/Theme
- ♦ **George Skelton**, *The Los Angeles Times*, for a Series on a Single Subject/Theme
- ♦ **The Los Angeles Times**, for Single Subject/Theme, "Special Education"
- ♦ **Laura Hayes**, *The Irvine World News*, for Continuous Coverage
- ♦ **Lisa Davis**, *The San Francisco Weekly*, for a Feature Story
- ♦ **Marie Mischel**, *The Elk Grove Citizen*, for Series on a Single Subject/Theme
- ♦ **The Elk Grove Citizen**, for Continuous Coverage
- ♦ **The Willits News**, for Editorials by a Publication and for a Series on a Single Subject/Theme
- ♦ **Kathryn Baron**, *KQED-FM, San Francisco*, for Continuous Coverage
- ♦ **Noel Cisneros**, *KRON-TV Channel 4, San Francisco*, for Newscast by an Individual

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**CALIFORNIA  
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# last mission

BY CHRIS HEDGES

**R**ogberi junction in Sierra Leone is one of those deadly little pieces of real estate, like Sniper's Alley in Sarajevo or the road to Suchitito in El Salvador, where death skulks in the gutted buildings and deserted stretches of bush. On May 24, four miles past the junction, on the rutted red-dirt track that heads to Lunsar and the diamond mines held by the rebels of Foday Sankoh's Revolutionary United Front, two journalists died. Reuters correspondent Kurt Schork, fifty-three, and AP television producer and cameraman Miguel Gil Moreno de Mora, thirty-two, were shot in an ambush, along with four government soldiers.

A small band of rebels stepped from behind an earth bank and riddled with bullets the two cars they were riding in. There is little doubt the insurgents knew who they were killing; they have gunned down a dozen journalists since the beginning of last year. Reuters photographer Yannis Behrakis and cameraman Mark Chisholm, in the car with Kurt, scrambled out of the vehicle and hid in the bush. They brought the bodies home.

The fraternity of war correspondents is small. Most drift from conflict to conflict. The pay, considering what is required, is paltry, and the majority, like Kurt and Miguel, work on contract. They tend to be a management nightmare. The suits back home dislike their chronic insubordination and volatile tempers. But the line of seasoned reporters and photographers willing to go to Bosnia, Kosovo, Kurdistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, East Timor, or Sierra Leone is short.

Kurt rarely left the siege of Sarajevo for four years, outlasting nearly all of his rivals, and Miguel stayed on in Grozny when all other reporters fled. They both liked risk and speed. They relished the confraternity of danger and the intensity of life lived on the edge of the abyss. Life, because of its obvious and daily transience, was sweeter, fuller, more powerful.

"War," J. Glenn Gray wrote, "com-

presses the greatest opposites into the smallest space and the shortest time." Kurt said he was intrigued by the job because it was a chance to study, under extreme conditions, "human behavior."

But along with these motives came another. Kurt and Miguel were endowed with the kind of conscience that allowed them to pit themselves against a hostile world, to live solitary and lonely lives in the face of tremendous suffering and indifference. Who really cares about Sierra Leone? Who cared much about Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia, East Timor, or Cambodia? They did. They pounded out stories or filed footage every day, hoping against hope that someone somewhere would do something. They wanted to make a difference, to change something. They did their work in anonymity. They were romantics, idealists. They had a purpose for being.

Miguel abandoned a career in 1993 as a corporate lawyer to ride his motorcycle into the former Yugoslavia. He roared like the Mad Hatter through the front lines around East-Mostar until Croatian HVO soldiers robbed him at a checkpoint of his machine. He was a devout Catholic, a member of Opus Dei, whose mother, upon hearing of his death, said that her son had been "ordained" to do his work. He did not drink. He found strength in prayer. He spent much of his journalistic career documenting atrocities against Muslims.

You have seen his footage; it was sold to nearly every news organization in the world, though he remained unseen. He understood that he was not the story, that he was there to, as he said, "tell the

stories of people who are going through the worst experiences in their lives." He filed footage of the Kosovar Albanians being herded by Serb soldiers through the streets of Pristina onto railroad cars. He slipped behind the lines with the Kosovo Liberation Army during the NATO campaign. He was the only Western reporter in Grozny during the worst of the Russian bombardment.

Kurt, a Rhodes scholar with Bill Clinton, left a life in politics and real estate at the age of forty and wound up in northern Iraq, where we covered the Kurds. He stood in a building while Peshmerga guerrillas gunned down some sixty Iraqi prisoners and photographed the slaughter. To the dismay of the Kurds, he filed. He was branded a spy and a traitor, excoriated by those he had come to write about. But he stayed on. There were no more massacres of prisoners, at least not on this scale.

In Sarajevo, where he became the best informed and most intrepid reporter in the war, he carried wounded off the streets into his armored car and used his vehicle to shelter civilians from sniper fire. Kurt and Miguel understood, as Rousseau wrote, that compassion is the quality from which "all the social virtues flow." They covered people who, without them, would have been silenced and butchered. They cast a light on crimes many did not want to see.

And, like so many of the brave, they were wickedly funny. I am incapable of remembering them without a smile. They lived lives of passionate intensity. I mourn them, but I do not pity them. ■

*Chris Hedges, a former Middle East and Balkan bureau chief for The New York Times, reports for the paper from New York City.*



**Cameraman Miguel Gil Moreno de Mora in Sierra Leone on May 15, nine days before he and reporter Kurt Schork were ambushed and killed**



**Kurt Schork**

AP/WIDEWORLD/REUTERS/CEBRIC

AP/WIDEWORLD/REUTERS/INSEY

# A Compulsion To Know

*With the presidential campaign back on the front pages, this issue's Journalist's Life tells the story of one of the new breed of political reporters — and also looks at the sages of the statehouse.*

BY BRENT CUNNINGHAM

According to the legend that has grown up around Mike Allen, he was once hit by a car (or a bus) while dashing to (or from) a courthouse in Richmond, suffered a broken arm (or leg, or no major injuries at all), and continued on to either a pay phone to dictate his story, or back to the newsroom to write it himself, before seeking medical attention (or not).

There are at least a half dozen versions of this story about the peripatetic *Washington Post* political reporter, each one tailing off into the mist of fuzzy memory and third-hand information. "Mike knows everything about everyone else, but you never know anything about him," says Andy Taylor, metro editor at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, where Allen worked for nine years. Allen — as with most things personal — won't help separate fact from fiction. "It's not something I focus on," is all he'll say about the incident. "It wasn't a highlight of my career."

True enough. Allen's career isn't wanting for highlights. He is the consummate political reporter, described by his colleagues as "a force of nature." And indeed, the wonderment that accompanies a hailstorm in July applies. At thirty-five, Allen is on his second turn at the *Post*, with a couple of years at *The New York Times* sandwiched in between. He may be the only reporter to have his byline in both

papers on the same day, November 4, 1999. Already, he has had his credentials yanked by Bill Bradley's campaign and forced John McCain to publicly explain the professed infallibility of his gaydar. He spent the winter chronicling the implosion of Bradley's presidential bid, now he's off to the conventions. In the fall he will be back traveling with either Bush or Gore. He has covered some of the more colorful characters of the last decade — Ollie North, Chuck Robb, Rudy Giuliani, Douglas Wilder, John and Lorena Bobbitt — and done it with the kind of detail deluge and unerring sense of the absurd that have made a Mike Allen story instantly recognizable. In a piece on Bradley last November in the *Post*, for example, Allen writes:

Since he announced his quest 11 months ago, Bradley has been campaigning against campaigning. His half-glasses slide down his nose, he jabs his hands into his suit pockets and when he pulls them out, the flaps stay hidden. He sucks Vitamin C drops and continually swishes his tongue under his lips and cheeks, as if cleaning his teeth. He is rumpled and bland — and proud of both.

"We have a lot of people who are great at the big picture analysis. Mike brings a topicality, an edge," says John Harris, a longtime friend and now fellow political reporter at the *Post*. "He hears everything and knows what everyone is chattering about in the

political circles. He really is representative of a new breed of reporter that is totally saturated in news and information in real time."

There is an urgency about Allen. Even his eyelids won't sit still. "The trademark Allen approach is to bat his eyes, almost to distraction, creating kind of a hypnotic metronome effect, until he gets people to say what he wants," says Bill McKelway, who worked with Allen at the *Times-Dispatch*. When he walks, his body is pitched slightly forward at the waist. He sleeps less than the average human being. And when hanging out, he alternates beer with iced tea or soda to maintain his edge. Driving six hours to chill with friends for a night, and somehow getting back to work the next day, is no big deal for Allen. "NPR," he shrugs. "Books on tape."

This urgency seems comfortably at odds with the mellow remnants of Allen's southern California roots — the thinning blond hair, the soft voice, the "dudes" that dot his speech. It gets channeled merrily into his reporting. He's a vacuum. A "Hoover of information," as one friend puts it. In Allen's stories, McCain doesn't just buy some cheese at a store in rural New Hampshire. He buys extra-sharp cheddar at Calef's Country Store. Allen explains: "Dude, what a different experience it is to drink a beer than to drink an Iron City, or a Tsing Tao."

The energy may be biological, but the love of politics and journalism is a little



MARIO TAMIA

Mike Allen in *The Washington Post* newsroom: understated, but very aggressive

easier to trace. The conflict and drama of politics nipped Allen when he was covering student government elections for his high school paper. A failed bid for student body president convinced Allen that he was "more suited to this side of the ballot." So it seems somehow an obvious fate that Allen wound up covering national politics at the most politically wired paper in the most politically juiced town. "I get very excited about chipping away at the mystery of how the American people choose their president," he says. And his work has not gone unnoticed. "He definitely made his mark during the campaign," says Maralee Schwartz, the *Post's* political editor.

Allen brings a kind of controlled frenzy to the *Post's* national staff, an info-age trumpet blast to the strong and steady beat coming for years from the likes of David Broder, Dan Balz, and David Maraniss. "We needed someone very quick and aggressive, and willing to throw himself into the day-to-day campaign stuff," says Bill Hamilton, the *Post's* enterprise editor. "Mike has a very understated way about him, but he is very aggressive."

He is so saturated with information that the runoff has become a kind of one-man news service for friends and acquaintances (I seem to have been added to the mailing list). He faxes and e-mails articles from all over and at all hours. "I get them at 3 A.M., 5 A.M.," says Bob Kemper, a political reporter at the *Chicago Tribune* who knows Allen from their days covering the Virginia general assembly. "He's the best-informed human being I've ever met."

Allen seems to have a compulsion to know. Over dinner at a Potomac-side restaurant one night last spring in D.C., Allen gently badgered our waiter, Harley — whom he had already charmed by suggesting that he change the name of his Harley Davidson to "Junior" — until he learned why the Secret Service was there: the Bulgarian ambassador and the president of Ireland. Satisfied, Allen returned to his gulf shrimp linguine, alternately sipping from a glass of iced tea and a pint of Foggy Bottom Ale. "I've never told Mike a bit of information or news, or even a bit of internal gossip here at the *Post*, that he didn't already know," says Harris, a fifteen-year *Post* veteran.

**T**he ability to function on little sleep helps make Allen's information gathering possible. "He doesn't sleep," says Eric Sundquist, lifestyle editor at *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, who worked with Allen in Richmond. "He doesn't pay much attention to where he lives. His place in Richmond was just big mounds of newspapers and a couple pieces of junky furniture. He views it as a base of operations." Allen, of course, is no help sorting all this out. "It's an urban myth," he says, "I sleep plenty."

Whatever plenty means in Allen's world, it seems to be enough, because he is as alive and curious at midnight as at midday. Both times we met he arrived with a stack of items for me to read. Prince takes back his name. Helen Thomas retires. The only subject Allen seems unprepared to discuss is himself. At dinner he does his best to keep the conversation trained on me. "You'd make a much more interesting profile," he says more than once, then grabs my notepad and starts asking me questions.

*continued on page 52*

# SAGES OF THE STATE- HOUSE

**T**hey're in every state-house, wedged into dingy basement press offices, skulking about the corridors. The statehouse sages. The political Methuselahs. Like Dave Yepsen of *The Des Moines Register*, who, every four years, in the run-up to the Iowa caucuses, pops up on CNN to dispense the inside dope on cornbelt politics. They live by the rhythms of the legislative session. They seem to know everyone from the governor to the ward-heeler, and everything that happens in their state's political circles. They are the ones who the national reporters turn to to get their bearings when they parachute in for a presidential race or some other big political story. In a transient business where hotshot reporters seem to always be working toward the next job, they bring a long view to state government coverage.

Here is a closer look at six political junkies who know what's really going on beyond the Beltway:

## CALIFORNIA



George Skelton

**L**istening to Sean Walsh describe an interview of his boss, former California Gov. Pete Wilson, by George Skelton, the *Los Angeles Times* columnist, is like listening to Diane Fossey explain gorilla talk. "It's the damndest thing," says Walsh, Wilson's press secretary. "George would watch the governor's body language and the governor would watch George's body language. They would grunt and nod their heads and that would communicate volumes of information that most people would miss."

Skelton, who grew up in Ojai, a small town about seventy miles north of Los Angeles, has been honing this primal understanding of the California political mind for nearly forty years, first as a UPI reporter and, since '74, at the *Times*. He has been a national political writer, political editor, and covered the first five years of the Reagan White House. But he couldn't shake Sacramento. "I'm weird, I guess," he says. "I actually think state government is important."

Now he roams the halls of the capitol, gathering ideas and information for his twice-weekly column. Bill Boyarsky, city editor at the *Times*, says Skelton's devotion to the craft of reporting has kept his column fresh. "George is no pundit," he says. "He's out reporting constantly."

Walsh calls Skelton "the most anticipated and most read" journalist in the state, and says he draws information from politicians "like no reporter I've seen." His secret? "I basically have respect for politicians," Skelton says. "Not all of them, but most of them have something they stand for, some things they want to get done. It's not that I'm not skeptical, but instead of trying to trick them into giving a good quote, I try to let them talk and find out what they are really thinking." ♦

## FLORIDA



Lucy Morgan

**B**ack in the early '60s, Lucy Morgan was married to a high school football coach and raising three small children in Crystal River, Florida, north of St. Petersburg. She no more planned to be a journalist than to go to the moon.

Then one day, a woman from the *Ocala Star-Banner*, a small paper in central Florida, knocked on Morgan's door and told her she was looking for a stringer to cover local news. "Why me?" Morgan asked. The woman said that the local librarian had told her that Morgan read more books than anyone in town, and the woman had figured that if Morgan could read, she could write.

Thus began a career that has spanned thirty-five years, all but three at the *St. Petersburg Times*. She won a Pulitzer (with Jack Reed) in 1985 for her exposé of a corrupt Pasco County sheriff, and since 1986 has run the *Times's* capital bureau in Tallahassee. There no doubt are Florida pols who — finding themselves nailed in her Saturday column — wish Morgan had opted for the moon instead.

"I describe myself as a nice grandmother," says Morgan, who does have eight grandchildren. "But some of the lawmakers here accuse me of getting my grandchildren from central casting."

In January, Morgan fell at the capitol and shattered her ankle into twenty-seven pieces. She picked up a staff infection and wound up covering part of the legislative session from a hospital bed, where she watched the floor sessions on television. "I actually found it much easier to focus on the flow of action," she says.

So much easier, in fact, that Morgan spotted a lawmaker trying to quietly withdraw a controversial bill from consideration without anyone noticing. She alerted one of her reporters on the floor, and the *Times* had another scoop. ♦

## LOUISIANA



John Maginnis

During the corruption trial in May of former Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards, media demand for a snippet of John Maginnis insight on the infamous rogue peaked. "I had to turn down *Geraldo* and *Hardball*," says Maginnis, whose newsletter, *Louisiana Political Fax Weekly*, is required reading for statehouse insiders. "It was getting in the way of my own coverage of the trial."

When you have made your living chronicling the life of the baddest politician to come along on the bayou since Huey Long, such attention is to be expected. Since returning to his native Baton Rouge in 1972 after grad school at Northwestern and a stint in the Navy, Maginnis has made a cottage industry out of Louisiana politics. Prior to starting the newsletter in '93, he published a series of weekly and monthly papers and wrote two books on Edwards. Now, in addition to the newsletter, Maginnis writes a syndicated column for twenty-five papers around the state, talks politics with other reporters on New Orleans public television, and serves as a sounding board for state and national media.

The four-page newsletter — which can be faxed or e-mailed — has 780 subscribers, including reporters as far away as Houston and Atlanta. It's a mix of news and analysis on everything from the governor's son's tussle with the state ethics board to a report on the stray cat with feline leukemia that became a fixture at the courthouse during the Edwards trial. Other than some part-time reporting help, it has always been a one-man operation. "John covers it from the ground up, the way it's supposed to be done," says Clancy DuBos, owner of the *Gambit Weekly*, an alternative paper in New Orleans.

"David Duke, Edwin Edwards, Bob Livingston," Maginnis says. "Louisiana politics has never let me down." ♦

## MICHIGAN



Hugh McDiarmid

In 1975, Neal Shine, then managing editor of the *Detroit Free Press*, was sitting in his glass-walled office with an associate editor, waiting to interview Hugh McDiarmid, their prospective new Lansing bureau chief. "I see this guy come into the newsroom wearing a tweed jacket with suede elbow patches, a rumpled pair of khakis, blue button-down shirt, and a bow tie," Shine recalls. "I said, 'If he is any good at all we're hiring him, because he looks the part.'"

They did hire him, and quickly discovered that McDiarmid lived the part even better than he dressed it. His wry, tightly written column carries considerable weight in state political circles. "He is the dean of statehouse reporters in this state," says Shine, who retired as publisher of the *Free Press* in '95. "He can skewer a politician so deftly the guy will be smiling and not even realize it happened until he looks down and sees the dagger."

But McDiarmid almost missed Detroit. After a stint as a Navy pilot in the '50s, McDiarmid was set to work for the CIA when he learned that the necessary clearances would take six months. "I needed the money right then," he says. So McDiarmid, who was a newspaper and politics junkie, got a job at the now-defunct *Dayton Journal-Herald*. He served as Washington correspondent, city editor, and Columbus correspondent before leaving for Lansing.

His son, Hugh McDiarmid, Jr., who also works at the *Free Press*, says it still isn't uncommon to find his father at "some weekend thing nobody else would go to just so he can stick something in his column."

The elder McDiarmid pleads guilty. "There's something about people in political life that makes them more interesting. Whether you like them or not is beside the point." ♦

## TEXAS



Wayne Slater

Sam Attlesley

In March, when the story broke that George W. Bush had rewarded fundraisers with sleepovers at the governor's mansion, Dan Balz, a *Washington Post* political writer, needed to quickly check Bush's claim that the guests in question were old friends first, money men second. Fortunately for Balz, who was out in Los Angeles for the GOP debate, he ran into Wayne Slater, *The Dallas Morning News's* Austin bureau chief and journalistic keeper of Bush's political history. "He told me it was true," Balz says, "and I trust Wayne because he is thorough and tough, but fair."

Between them, Slater and Sam Attlesley, the *Morning News's* political writer, have covered every political move the younger Bush has ever made. Attlesley, who joined the paper in 1975, covered Bush's congressional race in 1978. He has since co-authored a book on Texas politics, and has another in mind. Slater, who survived several AP bureaus, joined Attlesley in Austin in 1986.

Now, most of their time is spent tag-teaming the Bush campaign. Relationships forged over the years — Attlesley knew Bush spokeswoman Karen Hughes when she was a Dallas TV reporter, for example — and their nuanced grasp of Bush's past, give the duo an advantage on the trail. "It has been invaluable," says Attlesley.

The only problem is that they don't get the access they enjoyed when Bush was still just Governor Bush. Slater says he had been trying to wrangle an invitation to come see Bush's new 1,500-acre ranch near Waco, only to learn Bush had invited Barbara Walters instead. "I asked him about it," Slater says, "and he says, 'You write for a million people. She's seen by millions of people. You do the arithmetic.'" ♦

## A JOURNALIST'S LIFE

continued on page 49

When the waiters check in, he engages them. "You have a great memory," he tells the kid who recites the daily specials, eliciting a blush. When a cell phone rings within earshot — which is often — Allen reaches for his. After several false alarms, he calls the desk to see if there are any problems with his story. There aren't. He tells the desk editor to "have a wonderful evening."

Not infrequently, Allen steers his urgency onto the highway. Once, when he worked for the *Times*, he drove from New York to Richmond on a Friday night for a going-away party for a former colleague, easily a six-hour trip. Yet somehow he was back in New York on Saturday with enough time and energy to report and write an 1,100-word story on Mayor Giuliani's crackdown on city sex shops and strip clubs for Sunday's paper.

Over at Show World on Eighth Avenue, videotapes of John Wayne movies share shelf space with *Naughty Neighbors* magazine. Outside, a sign for a "Live Las Vegas Revue" is posted near the old one for rubber goods. Yesterday, customers seemed to be ignoring the new merchandise — T-shirts, pen sets, cellular phones — and heading straight for the "buddy booths" and the 25-cent classics like "Dirty Debs."

The incredibly detailed story — it contained scenes like that from all over the city — was the kind "that would take anyone else a week to write," says Bill McKelway, who was at the Richmond party. "I still don't know how he did it."

This commitment to friends and family is also a part of the Allen legend. "He's got such a kind way toward people," says McKelway. "He always remembers to ask about your sick aunt." Friends say Allen has a grandmother's memory for birthdays and anniversaries, and seems to always know what they've been up to. "I did a profile on McCain," says Kemper, "and the next time I saw Mike he says, 'Dude, killer quote.' And proceeds to quote something verbatim from my story that I didn't even remember."

Allen grew up the oldest of four children in a news-junkie family in Rossmore, California, (population

9,800), a "typically suburban" town near Seal Beach in Orange County. His father, Gary, an investor who died when Allen was in college, and his mother, Barbara, a first-grade teacher (now retired), subscribed to three papers — the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Orange County Register*, and the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*. Allen subscribed on his own to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. Mention to him that most kids don't do that, and Allen quickly notes: "I never got them both at the same time."

His interest in politics brought him to Washington and Lee University because he wanted to be near D.C. "When you're from California," Allen says, "Lexington, Virginia, is near D.C." Although he majored in journalism and politics, Allen took the LSAT and considered becoming a lawyer like nearly everyone else in his fraternity. "It was the thing to do," he says, "like the Web is now. But journalism is what I love, and I would never have been happy doing anything else." After school, he did a year at *The Free Lance-Star* in Fredericksburg, Virginia, then moved to the *Times-Dispatch* where, according to McKelway, he had an immediate impact on the paper's coverage. "His work was so much beyond the day-to-day reporting of news in terms of what he saw and wrote," says McKelway. "He just doesn't miss things."

In Richmond, Allen found time (of course) to string for *The New York Times*. Richard Berke, the *Times*'s national political correspondent, calls him the best stringer he has ever had. "He was tireless," Berke says. Allen's aggressive approach caused the occasional awkward moment. He once did a story for the *Times* — after the *Times-Dispatch* passed on it — about Gov. Wilder's refusal to attend a major fundraiser known as the Confederate Ball. The story, which had national appeal because Wilder was Virginia's first African-American governor, went out on the wire and wound up on the front page of *The Virginian-Pilot*, a rival of the *Times-Dispatch*, with Allen's byline. "That caused a bit of a ruckus in the newsroom," says Wes Allison, the medical writer at the *St. Petersburg Times*

who worked with Allen in Richmond. Allen says he felt terrible because his editors at the *Times-Dispatch* were so accommodating of his stringing work. "It was a completely unintended and distressing outcome," he says.

Allen's work caught the eye of *Washington Post* editors, and he was hired in 1996 to cover Virginia for the metro desk. A year later, he left for the *Times*, figuring he would never work anywhere else again. "I threw away my clips," he says. He covered city council for a while, and emerged from the notorious New York press scrums with a bit of reportorial wisdom: "In the scrum, you start asking your question and just don't stop," he says. "Everyone else will wimp out and you'll be the one left talking." Eventually he moved to Hartford, where he served as a one-man bureau for a while, a time he still recalls wistfully. "When the legislative session ended there this year it was so sad, I really wanted to be there," says Allen. But his desire to do national politics persisted. Allen says he never dreamed of covering national politics, but his friends say otherwise. "He would call to discuss things he could propose to get in on their (*Times*'s) election coverage," says Hampden H. Smith III, head of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications at Washington and Lee. Last year, when the *Post* dangled a job on the national staff, Allen couldn't resist.

Allen is disarmingly positive in a business full of cynics, but his stories are the work of a shrewd reporter. "The approach I take with politicians is kind of tough love," he says. "I want to get to know them enough to appreciate them, but it's no service to the reader if I cut them any breaks." Immediately after rejoining the *Post*, Allen was traveling with Bradley. To prepare, he went to the Library of Congress and read all the old profiles on the scholarly hoops hero. It gave Allen a real sense of who the candidate was for millions of older Americans. "There is this complete fascination with Bradley beyond politics," he says. "Our parents watched him on TV. He was a celebrity in a way you or I couldn't know. I saw this tremendous gap between people's perception of him and what was really there as a candidate. They assumed there was going to be this magic connection, and it just wasn't there."

## 'JOURNALISM IS WHAT I LOVE TO DO, AND I WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN HAPPY DOING ANYTHING ELSE'

Allen's stories on Bradley got at that gap as well as anyone's. A February 13 piece on Bradley's missed opportunities began with a scene from the candidate's visit to an inner-city Los Angeles middle school to push gun control:

A famous scholar-athlete, barrio kids, guns — the ingredients were there for a memorable scene, with irresistible pictures for the evening news.

"You're reading *Ulysses*?" he asked. "He went on a long journey." Bradley twice said he was proud of the pupils and their school. "Just keep going," he advised. "Just keep going up, up — okay?"

And then without bending over or sitting down or engaging with any of the 23 pupils or their teacher, he was gone. But, what about guns?

"Mike was the first reporter to capture the Bradley personality and the political defects of that personality," says John Harris. The Bradley folks complained a bit. Then, they complained a lot. They booted Allen from the campaign for, in their view, violating the understanding that what happens on the campaign plane is off the record. The offending story was one Allen wrote for the *Post's* Web site about Bradley feigning a heart attack (when his health was a campaign issue) and mimicking Al Gore for reporters on the plane. But Allen wasn't on the plane. He got the story from reporters who were. "How can something be off the record when you weren't there?" asks Allen. "It was a tense time for them. I understand if they wanted to blow off a little steam. We've all moved on."

**M**oving on — to the next story, the next whatever — is Allen's preferred state of being. It is difficult to know where work stops and the rest of his life begins. "I don't know that the place 'outside of work' exists for Mike," says Bob Kemper. Mercifully, the *Post* expanded the use of its Web site last fall with an afternoon online edition. It provides the ideal outlet for Allen's abundant stray voltage, liberating him from those pesky print deadlines, which, even for the big stuff, can only stretch to 1:30 A.M. Maralee Schwartz says Allen writes for the Web every day, and even writes stories for the Web that don't go into the paper.

When he found himself on the West Coast with the Bradley campaign, Allen would crank something out for the Web site before the bus left around 7:30 A.M., because, he says, there wouldn't be any events before the noon eastern deadline. In May, when New York Mayor Giuliani withdrew from his Senate race, Allen says he did his "personal best": five stories in six hours, four versions for the Web, and a thirty-five-inch story for the paper. You get the sense Allen would bring the same joyful doggedness to a Prince George's County sanitation board story. "Any job I've had, I could do it forever and have a great time," he says.

The thing is, you believe him. Giving a tour of the *Post* newsroom late one night, Allen's reverence for the place is obvious. He rouses cartoonist Herb Block, who is still working at 10:30 p.m., for a brief introduction. We go to Broder's office, which is a disaster, stacks of books and papers everywhere, a chair

turned upside down in the middle of it all. We peer into Bob Woodward's darkened office. "When I worked here the first time, I didn't know where it was, and everyone who came to visit wanted to see it," he says. At Allen's own desk we pass without stopping. I note that the nameplate atop his computer reads: Mike Allen. Why doesn't he ask them to fix it? "Hey, anyone can have Allen spelled with two Ls," he says.

He lives within walking distance of the *Post*, and tells you this like it was some great coup. "When I was in the Alexandria bureau I lived right across the street," he says. It is midnight on a Tuesday. The streets around the *Post* are empty. Allen, just blocks from home, hails me a cab and waves goodbye. As the cab pulls away I turn to see him, fortified with iced tea, heading back inside. ■

Brent Cunningham is an assistant editor at *CJR*.

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# Hearst 101

## *San Francisco Fiasco is a Textbook Case*

BY THOMAS C. LEONARD

**H**ow can a journalism school beef up its study of values? This may be the year we need Hearst Studies.

The new textbook is *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, by David Nasaw (CJR, May/June). This is a story of the conceptual breakthrough that created modern media enterprises. Nasaw is the first biographer to see clearly how Hearst reached beyond print to the new media of his times. *The Chief* gives us something more to think on than the legends of the bully-swell of a war in Cuba and the cankered old man in the film *Citizen Kane*. Hearst stirred news and entertainment into the multimedia soup.

His Hearst Corporation has been providing fresh case studies for almost a year now since announcing it would sell the Chief's flagship, the *San Francisco Examiner*, in order to acquire the larger, more successful *Chronicle*. The move would end a Joint Operating Agreement that had kept the *Examiner* alive. The assumption was that after a fig-leaf effort to find a buyer to satisfy the letter of the antitrust laws, the *Examiner* would go away and then the company would make a lot of money, some of which would go to improving the *Chronicle* by the addition of the *Examiner* staff.

It didn't happen that way. Under Justice Department pressure, Hearst offered to subsidize an *Examiner* buyer, and a deal was made with the Fang family, politically active publishers of community papers. One of the unsuccessful bidders, Clint Reilly, filed suit to block the sale on antitrust grounds. That case went to trial, which turns out to be a rich source for the Hearst ethics class . . . and a headache for the corporation.

It seems that *Examiner* publisher Timothy White had conversations with Mayor Willie Brown in which a tradeoff of Brown support for Hearst's takeover for a more positive editorial policy toward the mayor was discussed. Did Hearst swap the editorial independence of the *Examiner* in order to get the mayor's help in extracting itself from a JOA and gaining the larger paper? Hearst president and c.e.o.

Frank A. Bennack told a federal court that the firm's twelve newspapers held to the core values of "Journalism 101." But both Bennack and George B. Irish, president of Hearst Newspapers, testified that they were unsure what their California publisher was up to. These New York executives had missed signs of trouble sent to them in e-mails and witnessed by company lawyers. The *Examiner* has used both its front and editorial page to defend its reputation. There are already enough URLs with documents on this matter to keep an ethics class busy most of the semester, including a recent allegation that Hearst corporate executives had ordered an *Examiner* story about the *Chronicle* killed.

Hearst executives are testing a classic question in public relations classes: Is it better to keep your mouth shut while you investigate or to face reporters' questions head on? The company has appointed a former federal judge to see if influence was traded in San Francisco. Key Hearst executives have taken the stand, but shunned the press. Hearst Corporate Communications says it has provided sixty contacts with the press during the trial. None of these have been press conferences. For two weeks the Hearst team in San Francisco appeared in television



The Chief in a teaching mode

news reports mostly as suits leaving a building who refused all comment.

This is not the way others are defending their reputations. Ted Fang, buyer of the *Examiner*, answered all questions put to him after he testified (a grilling that began with the revelation that he had shaded the truth about a Berkeley degree in Ethnic Studies). Reilly, the wealthy San Franciscan who is suing to stop the *Chronicle-Examiner* deal, followed Fang to the microphones. Reilly's talkative attorneys have dominated the news cycle and his Web site (saveournews.com) has been the best single source of information on the case.

Jane Kay, a veteran environmental reporter at the *Examiner*, corrected me when I suggested that clinical depression might be found in the newsroom. "We're beyond that," she said. "We are like the abused children in daycare." Stephanie Salter wrote a column about this for the *Chronicle-Examiner* Sunday paper. "Living in fear and uncertainty is a fiesta compared to having your newspapers' guts pulled out and displayed in federal court," she said. Debra J. Saunders said in her *Chronicle* column that she and her colleagues felt "a kick in the stomach." "We found out

## 'It is too early to tell whether ethnic bile has been purged or amnesia has set in.'

we're garbage" is what *Examiner* columnist Rob Morse told his readers after spending three days in the courtroom.

**W**ith Hearst business enterprise and editorial dysfunction so much in the news, it is hard to appreciate how much of the story is being missed. Even at ground zero in the Bay Area, the stunning ethnic change for San Francisco journalism has gotten little attention. A Hearst Studies course can be built around two headlines:

YELLOW JOURNALISM WINS A SIGNAL VICTORY IN FIGHT TO KEEP THE CHINESE OUT OF THE UNITED STATES  
*San Francisco Examiner*, March 13, 1902

SOLD! FANG FAMILY TO ACQUIRE EXAMINER  
*San Francisco Examiner*, March 17, 2000

The Fangs will get the Hearst paper's archives as part of the deal. Ted Fang cited this in court as a valuable asset that he had his eye on. If he goes through those archives, he will find a news organization that was once tone deaf to the new Californians from Asia.

"Velly suspicious... velly wily... velly much dope," was the way the old Hearst reporters and headline writers would

refer to Chinatown. "The exclusion of Chinese immigration, now and forever, is the unalterable demand of the Pacific Slope States," the *Examiner* thundered in 1892. "The Chinaman is always a foreigner," said the paper early in the 1900s. Like many metropolitan papers in the West a century ago, the *Chronicle* was equally confident that Chinese families were not really part of the American public — this during a period without any threat to national security from China and at a time when the Chinese population of the city never rose above 10 percent. San Francisco's editorial writers exploded against the Chinese in years when fewer than 2,500 Chinese had moved into their town.

Today, both papers understand what life would be like without the enterprise of a particular Chinese family. Absent the Fangs, the *Chronicle* owners and Hearst would be trapped in what they claim is a damaging JOA. They would be fighting the Justice Department over antitrust issues. Bad as their problems are today, they would be worse without the enterprise that came from Chinatown. Like governments in the old South (and many universities across the country) these papers have been renewed by people they once could not recognize as fellow citizens.

In the April 3 edition of *Editor & Publisher*, Ted Fang spoke with cautious praise of the Chief: "Hearst had a lot of good newspaper instincts. But I would not go so far as to say I admire him." Fang told me that his family stands for "inclusion" and that he feels part of "an American story dripping with irony." The subtleties of the "post-ethnic" are being discovered in many academic fields; this is a sign of them in the newspaper game.

In San Francisco, it is too early to tell whether ethnic bile has been purged or amnesia has set in. But a sick feeling about journalistic values has spread. Publisher Fang set his jaw and spoke with emphasis at the press conference following his testimony: "The Hearst Corporation is going to have to live with the things that have come out in this case." ■

Thomas C. Leonard is associate dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California, Berkeley. He is writing a book on bad character in the media.



Ted Fang speaks for 'inclusion'

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## Covering College Coaches: At Their Feet, or at Their Throat



BY JAMES CAREY

James Carey is the CBS Professor of International Journalism at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. He was the Dean of the College of Communications at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana until 1992, and is the author of *Television and the Press*, *Communication as Culture*, and *James Carey: A Critical Reader*.

Indiana University's president, Myles Brand, along with the trustees of the school, have taken some heavy weather over their decision to retain Bobby Knight as head basketball coach. They deserved it. Knight should have been fired over twenty years ago when his public behavior began to deteriorate and later yet when he began tossing chairs across the floor or marching his team off the court during a game with the Soviet national team. Knight's detractors, and many of the faculty and administration at Indiana are among them, have been waiting for the Woody Hayes type incident to provide the occasion for his dismissal. Once Indiana officials had a "smoking gun," however ambiguous Knight's choke hold on his former player Neil Reed, it was a disservice to them, to college basketball, to us all, to let Knight off the hook with a modest fine, suspension, and reprimand.

That said, there has been plenty of sanctimony surrounding the case. Knight was saved not only because the president and trustees were toadies and cowards, nor solely because he had the support of IU fans, allegations which conveniently get everyone else off the hook. The fact is that Bobby Knight is perhaps the most powerful public figure in Indiana and very few people from the governor on down are willing to cross him. Nor is this peculiar to the Hoosier state. Legendary college coaches — Frank Broyles, Bear Bryant, Tom Osborne, Woody Hayes come to mind — wielded enormous clout with legislators and public officials because of the simple fact that their teams and their success were the most visible symbols of the state at large. And this clout was exercised, in case after case, to implicitly hold hostage university

budgets, building programs, and academic enterprises, even if never publicly mentioned. Such coaches had and have easier and more potent access to power brokers in state politics whether c.e.o.'s or elected officials than does any college president.

These facts are hardly secrets among sports writers but are conveniently forgotten in the periodic eruption of scandal in college athletics. Nor is the source of the power unknown: it comes from the uncritical coverage lavished upon coaches by the news media. These legends are made, made by sports writers and not merely those from the hometown paper who operate as part of the coach's personal publicity apparatus. Sports journalism generally is blind to politics and power and sports writers willfully ignore the implications of their own work in promoting and sustaining the omnipotence of college coaches. Of their relationship to coaches it truly can be said, they are either at their feet or at their throat. They can do everything about college athletics but cover it.

Even if we absolve journalists for their political ignorance, there is something unforgivable in their feigned journalistic ignorance. It did not take much investigation to discover that Knight followed a practice common among coaches of motivating players through verbal abuse and such abuse frequently involved physical contact. After hours sports writers talk about it all the time. They not only talk about it, but they observe it, at practice, around the gym, and on the playing field. They may not have sources that will attest to it, even anonymously, such is the potency of coaches, but their eyes and ears would be testimony enough if only they would risk using them. Such reporting would dissolve leg-

ends, of course, reveal the ugliness of the game, and make college sports a less attractive beat.

We all know the truth. College athletics is a corrupt and corrupting enterprise. The forces of commerce entered education first through athletics and have spread through every nook and cranny of such institutions. It is not only players, coaches, athletic departments, admissions and grading standards and an honor system among students that has been corrupted; it is the whole bloody enterprise.

Still, college athletics speaks to a genuine need. I am not only thinking of the support big-time sports provides to minor sports and women's athletics or the rallying point teams provide for the identity of institutions with their faculty, students, and alumni. At least in the state universities, athletic teams provide one of the few (one is tempted to say only) points of identification between ordinary citizens and the states they inhabit. In states without professional teams — Nebraska for example — the university is the focal point of state pride, indeed is the most pregnant symbol of the existence of the state at a time when a sense of place is under threat of extinction.

There are solutions to such problems, ways of detaching intercollegiate athletics from the structure of universities while preserving their valuable functions, including the provision of a sense of place. However, there are forces, well beyond toadying presidents, that will prevent any rational solution to the problems of college sports. Alas, there are interests, including those of pharisaical journalists, devoted to preserving the corruption so ardently criticized when a coach's hand gets on a player's throat. ■



# Coverage of Women at the Top: The Press has a Long Way to Go



BY CATHERINE DAILY AND DAN R. DALTON

Catherine M. Daily is Kossin Faculty Fellow of Strategic Management at the Kelley School of Business in Indiana University, where Dan R. Dalton is dean and Harold A. Poling Chair of Strategic Management. Article courtesy of *BridgeNews*.

**T**he media coverage accorded to top female executives can be quite flattering. Yet the accomplishment

and promise is too often tempered by the tired, negative stereotypes of women.

Consider Carleton "Carly" Fiorina. As the new chief executive of Hewlett-Packard, Fiorina oversees the largest public corporation ever led by a woman. Despite her accomplishments, *U.S. News & World Report* referred to her as a "former receptionist" and the "consummate corporate cheerleader." *Fortune* described her as "affable and stylish, dressed in a brown Armani pantsuit," commenting further that Fiorina "seems as comfortable with power as any woman could be."

To be sure, Fiorina was also highlighted as the "first woman to run one of the nation's twenty largest corporations." Even so, there was just that little something at the end, a temptation that *Fortune* evidently could not resist. "Expect to see her on the covers of *Fortune*, *Business Week*, and *Forbes* — heck, maybe she'll even make *InStyle*."

Upon being appointed chief executive of Avon Products, Andrea Jung, too, was heralded in the business and financial press. The press, however, did not always seem to be on point with regard to Jung's professional portfolio. *Fortune* described her as "glamorous" and "garrulous." *Newsweek* magazine called her "stylish." These are not descriptions we've seen ap-

plied to her male colleagues, and certainly not to her male predecessors in Avon's executive suite.

Following Darla Moore's generous gift of \$25 million to the University of South Carolina School of Business, a *Business Week* headline announced THE LADY IS A B-SCHOOL. To *Fortune* Moore is THE TOUGHEST BABE IN BUSINESS. We do not recall similar references to E. W. Kelley, after whom the Kelley School of Business of Indiana University is named, or Gordon S. Marshall, after whom the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California is named.

◆  
In another example of bitter-sweet coverage, Ann Winblad, a partner at Hummer Winblad, was identified by *Money* magazine not only as "one of Silicon Valley's preeminent venture capitalists," but also as the former girlfriend of Bill Gates. We may all rest better knowing "Gates spends one weekend a year with her." But articles about Sun chief executive Scott McNealy or Cisco Systems chief executive John Chambers fail to mention former companions or the frequency and duration of their relationships.

Women's roles in entrepreneurial companies got proper respect in a cover piece that asked, "Women entrepreneurs are getting rich . . . so why aren't they getting famous?" But the cover of the magazine, *Entrepreneur and Business Start-Ups*, exclaimed "Girls Rule!" Does anyone expect that the next piece admiring the managerial accomplishments of, for example, Intel chairman Andy Grove, Amazon.com's Jeff Bezos, or General Electric chairman Jack Welch will be headlined BOYS RULE?

Perhaps some industries do

lend themselves to gender-based stereotyping. Martha Stewart, chief executive of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, may actually enjoy *Newsweek's* label "Master of the Domestic Universe."

And certainly, *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour is not concerned about descriptions of her attire; she is one of the most powerful figures in the fashion industry and an accomplished manager. Yet we wonder if *Newsweek's* description of her as having a "diva demeanor," being "whippet-thin," with "killer heels" and "a manner as severe as her Louise Brooks bob" isn't a bit over the top.

◆  
Not all examples we discovered compromise otherwise positive coverage about women with substantial corporate responsibility. Jill Barad, former chief executive of the toy company Mattel, was associated with some decline in the fortunes of the company. But the suggestion by *The Economist* that "she should have stuck to marketing, rather than worrying her pretty little head about running the company" is definitely more than a bit much.

◆  
These examples were not difficult to find. We don't think these slights to women are deliberate. We aren't suggesting that journalists be indicted for using such language in their stories. Still, they testify to the subtle barriers to women in the corporate world.

Some may believe that the problems can be solved by raising the consciousness of a few insensitive male writers. It's not that easy: more than half of the examples above were written by women. It's as clear as the glass ceiling that there's still a lot of work to do. ■

# Case Study: Manhandled Complaint Of Sexual Harassment in the Army



BY GENEVA OVERHOLSER

Geneva Overholser (genevaoh@aol.com), a syndicated columnist for The Washington Post Writers Group, writes regularly for CJR about newspapers. Among positions she has held are editorial writer for *The New York Times*, editor of *The Des Moines Register*, ombudsman for *The Washington Post*. She also served nine years on the Pulitzer Prize board.

Ours is a craft rightly famed for defensiveness. We can make or break an enterprise or a reputation, yet we're inexcusably reluctant to acknowledge our errors, and ridiculously modest in presenting corrections when at last we

do. Lately, though, it looks to me as if

we're improving.

The *Los Angeles Times*, of course, showcased the dickens out of its media reporter's lengthy look at the Staples mess. *The New York Times* reliably confronts nettlesome questions about its own practices, going well beyond corrections of fact into errors of tone, omissions, and even misleading juxtapositions.

And *The Washington Post*, whose reporters have long been known for the "defensive crouch" that former executive editor Ben Bradlee used to urge them out of, recently showed how powerful a personal acknowledgment of poor journalism can be in rectifying a bad situation.

There was plenty of rectification to be done. The story in question concerns the sexual-harassment allegation made by Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy. *The Washington Times* broke the story, and *The New York Times* and other papers had advanced it, by the time the *Post* entered the fray on April 1 with a piece by Thomas E. Ricks.

It was awful. To be fair, much of the information that was to make the Kennedy saga eminently clearer was still to emerge — the name of the general being accused, Major General Larry G. Smith; the fact that Smith's intended promotion was to the job of deputy inspector general where he'd be responsible for investigating accusations (including sexual harassment) against senior officers;

and, of course, the fact that the Army would eventually substantiate Kennedy's charges.

The Ricks story created a very different picture: the Army's highest-ranking woman was making sexual-harassment complaints against another general concerning an incident from "several years ago," brought forward formally only now — "after the man she had accused was promoted."

"It is extremely unusual for charges to be brought by one Army general against another," said the story. "More than most institutions, the Army values discretion, especially at the top."

Further, "There was widespread irritation within the Army at Kennedy yesterday," which Ricks proceeded to amplify without benefit of attribution. He told us that Kennedy's "work as chief of Army intelligence has won few admirers. Pentagon insiders also speculated that Kennedy may be acting now because she recently lost out in a competition for one of the top slots in the Army."

Also, "Kennedy . . . may have been taken aback by the internal criticism that emerged against her when her name was raised for the post at Training and Doctrine Command." On went the nameless criticism, courtesy of "many people inside the Pentagon." A retiree who remembers Kennedy "from her younger days" as a very impressive officer provided the sole balance — in the final graf.

In one of those all-too-common journalistic phrases that virtually define self-actualization, Ricks told us, "The high-profile confrontation appears likely to bring a sour note to the end to the thirty-one-year career of Kennedy."

*Post* readers being a keen-eyed group, they howled. "My take on the *Post* story, as I reflect on it, is that

the flavor was that of 'scorned woman takes revenge, files sexual harassment charge,'" said one. "The more I consider the piece in the *Post*, the more outrageous it seems."

Another said the article "should be required reading in every course on sexual harassment. This is exactly why women are hesitant to complain about harassment, let alone file charges. Various other Army officers decided to circle the wagons and trash the victim, and the *Post* was a willing participant. When enlisted women see that this can happen to someone as high up as a lieutenant general, well, then, do you really believe they are going to file complaints?"

The good news is those complaints were well aired — in a Sunday ombudsman's column taking a hard look at the offending piece. What was even better (and far more unusual) is that Ricks and a *Post* editor were forthrightly regretful in discussing the work with the ombudsman, E. R. Shipp. "Clearly, in retrospect, the tone of the story was off," Ricks said. "The person I trust most was my wife, and she said that it was striking."

"It's fair criticism in retrospect that readers thought we were trying to blame the victim. That was not our intent," said Liz Spayd, an editor on the national desk. Ricks spoke of lessons learned, and of exactly what he might have done differently. Spayd and Shipp noted that the rest of the *Post*'s reporting on the matter broadened the context and balanced the picture.

But plenty of our subjects appear in the news only once: they have one shot at balanced treatment. Far more often than we like to admit, it isn't a fair shot. Making that admission — and making amends — is something we badly need to get better at. ■

# Blacking Out ABC News: From Robber Barons To Media Barons



**BY LAWRENCE K. GROSSMAN**

Lawrence K. Grossman, a former president of NBC News and PBS, is a regular columnist for *CJR*.

**"A** war between the rich and the very wealthy — with the American consumer caught in the middle." That's how FCC Chairman William E. Kennard depicted the shameful fracas between Time Warner and Disney-ABC that for thirty-nine hours in May blacked out *World News Tonight*, *Nightline*, and the local news from 3.5 million cable homes. The chairman was right on target.

Time Warner, in its arrogance, thought it could get away with depriving cable subscribers of the celebrity version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Even worse, Time Warner deprived millions of people of a major source of the news, a disservice to the public and a demonstration of raw corporate power that is a danger to democracy. The dissemination of news became the victim of mammoth battling telecommunications empires seeking to crush competition and dominate the information age. As invariably happens when the rich and the wealthy fight, they resolved their dispute and the customers will pay.

Still at issue is a far more important question than who gets how much money. When America Online and Time Warner merge, will the new Internet-cable-movie-TV-music-news-book-and-magazine-publishing behemoth wield so much control over access to both the Internet and cable distribution that it will stifle competition? I'm no fan of government regulation, but the mistake the government made a long time ago in cable was to allow the major cable operators, the monopoly gatekeepers who decide which program services people can see, to own many of the

program services they distribute on cable. The cable titans say, "Trust us, we treat everyone equally." But in real life they favor the content they own and do whatever they can to squelch the competition.

I learned this firsthand some fifteen years ago when I ran NBC News. Encouraged initially by several major cable operators, NBC News tried to launch a twenty-four-hour cable news service to compete against Ted Turner's CNN, then a monopoly. As the cable moguls told me privately, Ted had the industry over a barrel. Not only was CNN the only cable news service there was, it was also the only cable programming that subscribers cared about. Confident that no cable operator would dare pull the plug on CNN, Turner demanded that the cable operators pay a huge rate hike for carrying his news service. To arm themselves for battle, the cable operators assured us they'd welcome our new cable news network as leverage against CNN.

Realizing he had a major fight on his hands, Turner figured out how to solve his money needs, freeze out NBC News, and preserve his news monopoly — a triple play. He quickly sold a financial stake in CNN to a handful of the nation's biggest cable operators and in return they closed the door to any news competition that might reduce the value of CNN. NBC's proposed twenty-four-hour news channel, barred from the major cable systems, couldn't get the distribution it needed. Later, the cable operators did agree to carry CNBC, NBC's new financial channel, but only after exacting a pledge that it "would not become a general news service in direct competition with CNN," NBC president Robert C. Wright testified to the FCC.

In 1993, CBS ran into the same stone wall when it tried to get cable operators to accept a competing news channel. A year later, News Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch, frustrated at not being able to start a cable news channel of his own, complained to *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine that the major cable operators, including cable titan John Malone and Time Warner chairman Gerald Levin, "would not give me the time of day," so eager were they to protect CNN's twenty-four-hour news monopoly. No wonder former FCC general counsel Henry Geller called the cable model "a First Amendment horror story," one that violated the amendment's underlying premise that the American people should receive information from sources as diverse as possible. When Time Warner bought Turner's entire broadcasting and sports empire in 1996, the government refused to approve the deal unless Time Warner's cable systems agreed to carry competing cable news services so that subscribers could finally watch the news of their choice.

Still, as we head beyond cable to the age of the World Wide Web, we face a different kind of "First Amendment horror story." While we now have plenty of channels to choose from, the news, information, and entertainment we see are increasingly being created, produced, and delivered by a shrinking number of interlocking global telephone, television, cable, and Internet conglomerates. Thus, AT&T, the leading long distance phone company, owns cable operator TCI, which has held an interest in CNN. AT&T is also acquiring MediaOne, the giant cable company, that holds a stake in Time Warner Enter-

tainment, part of the huge multimedia corporation that is about to be bought by AOL, the nation's dominant Internet service provider.

In their zealous effort to dominate the new information age, today's media barons are following in the legendary footsteps of last century's robber barons. At the start of the industrial age, a handful of business titans led by J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie, and Edward Harriman merged each other's railroad lines, iron and coal mines, steel plants, and oil companies into several giant interlocking industrial trusts. According to historians Mary R. and Charles A. Beard, "by the end of the [nineteenth] century the major portion of manufacturing... was concentrated in the hands of... a few corporations. Although not many of these gigantic concerns had complete monopolies, ... they had a power so great that they could often exercise a decisive influence over the cost of raw materials, the prices of finished products, and the fortunes of independent competitors..." They built up such "a wide dominion over the economy in general, over politics, and over public opinion..." that the government finally had to step in with antitrust laws to break them up.

Yesterday the industrial revolution! Today the information revolution! Yesterday's Standard Oil, US Steel, and great railroad empires have been replaced by today's AOL-Time Warner, Viacom-CBS, GE-NBC, Microsoft, MCI-Worldcom-Sprint, and Disney-ABC. When Time Warner blacked out Disney's ABC last spring during sweeps week, Disney, itself a quintessential competition squasher, ran to the FCC to seek protection from what it called "a remarkable display of monopoly power" (ironic coming from the company that is fighting for restrictive copyright legislation, a law some call "the Mickey Mouse Protection Act," that would extend Disney's domain over its intellectual properties, hinder innovation, and limit public discourse).

We hooted at the Orwellian message Time Warner left on our blank TV screens, "Disney has taken ABC away from you." But it's not funny. We need new rules to stop the growing concentration of media. Here's a message for the computer screens of the FCC, FTC, and Justice Department: "Better to limit the mega-media mergers now than have to break them up later." ■

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# Six Surefire Ways to Make Campaign Coverage a Hit



## MEMO

To: Macon Bucks, Vice President for Raking It In, CBS-Viacom  
From: Edward R. Notmorrow, Director, News Appetite Enhancement Project

**M**acon, we've got a big problem. The top domestic story of the year, the presidential campaign, is an

BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON

Christopher Hanson, a contributing editor to *CJR*, teaches journalism at the University of Maryland. He worked for twenty years as a reporter in Washington, D.C.

eye-glazing bore. Good times at home, no Big Bad Wolf abroad, and the demise of John McCain's candidacy have completely turned the audience off to political news. Some three-fifths of the public think the race is dullsville, according to a poll commissioned by this network and *The New York Times*, in May. The collective public yawn can only be contributing to those disappointing *Evening News* ratings and ad revenues. I'm writing to suggest some options for making the campaign and the *Evening News* less of a bottom-line burden. Here goes:

**Nailing the Niches.** The mass audience for political coverage is dwindling in part because the cable revolution has created so many alluring alternatives to broadcast news. We need to go after these niche cable markets, offering partnerships in which campaign news is targeted to select audiences. Precedents include MSNBC and CNBC, which are aimed at financial news junkies and talk show addicts. I envision even more precise audience targeting to hit the news-averse market with short segments. **CBS News on the SciFi Channel**, for instance, might cover candidate attitudes toward the paranormal. **CBS News on The Cartoon Network** would address views on the "V chip" and parental warning.

(An animated version of the reporters and candidates would be well worth the expense.) **CBS on E!**, the fashion and glamour channel, might give us a feature like "Inside Tipper Gore's Closet."

**News you can't choose.** Another untapped market for our political news is the captive audience, people stuck for the moment in one place with little to do. These people are desperate for *any* diversion and can be induced to watch what they otherwise would avoid like broccoli. CNN seems to have pioneered captive market exploitation with its special airport channel, while NBC has sold a special in-flight video news service to United Airlines. Enterprising firms like Captivate Network have already brought video and headline services to elevators, supermarket check-out lines, gas pumps, and even Magnetic Resonance Imaging chambers. But we could explore other captive audiences — for instance, patients undergoing laser vision correction (the eye remains open during the procedure).

Perhaps the biggest market of this sort consists of commuters gridlocked in their cars. For them, we could institute the **CBS News Transpo-cast**. Political coverage would be viewed on huge screens that would be installed along such congested highways as the Santa Monica Freeway and the Capital Beltway. But could daily detail about the Bush-Gore race increase incidents of road rage? We should definitely consult Legal before moving ahead on this.

**Asking the tough questions.** Given the revived popularity of quiz shows, we could use that format — wildly exuberant contestants and

mounting cash prizes of up to a million dollars for right answers to political questions — to hook the public on the campaign, drive up ratings, and draw in advertisers. As with *21*, each contestant would have an expert helper with whom to consult on the toughest questions — in this case a journalist like David Broder, to add gravitas.

**Stand-up "reporting."** You have no doubt seen the survey data indicating that many people now get virtually all of their news — political and other — from topical jokes on late night television monologues, including those of our own David Letterman. His snarky attitude still seems to strike a chord after all these years. What about teaming up Letterman with Rather? *The David Letterman Show/CBS Evening News* would combine music by top and emerging performers, weird animal acts, and stand-up comedy with insights into the candidates' policies. Dan Rather, whose contract still has some time to run, might be used in the Ed McMahon role, setting up punch lines. I asked one of Letterman's gag writers to come up with an example, and the focus groups ate it up.

**RATHER (deadpan):** Democratic candidate Al Gore charged today that Republican George W. Bush's ambitious, fifty-state anti-ballistic missile defense plan was dangerous. (Cut to Letterman, rolling his eyes in an exaggerated, here-we-go-again manner. Titters from audience.)

**RATHER (continuing, clearly irritated):** Gore suggested the plan could lead the Chinese to build up their nuclear arsenal in order to overwhelm American defenses —

a result that, in a crisis, might lead Beijing to deliver a full scale barrage against American cities.

**LETTERMAN:** Hey, hold the MSG! (*laughter*) That's one case where I hope they DO get the wrong address or the wrong order! (*more laughter*) Speaking of home deliveries, Dan, those Chinese can be pretty — shall we say — unreconstructed. The fortune in my cookie the other night said, "Woman's mouth like twenty-four-hour restaurant: always open." (*intense laughter*)

**RATHER** (*unsmiling*): Which leads us to the gender gap in the presidential electorate. It seems, for the moment at least, to be shrinking. A Gallup poll released today... (*Letterman rolls eyes*)... And so on.

**Starcasts.** An alternative to Letterman would be to replace Rather with a rotating ensemble of stars, coating the news pill with celebrity sweeteners like Sharon Stone. (Watch out, Leonardo!) We could push the celebrity journalist gambit a few moves further by reenacting the day's election events on our newscast, using ac-

tors as stand-ins for campaign figures. How about George Clooney as Bush and Woody Harrelson as Gore? Who knows, we might even sell the FCC on the idea that reenactment is a form of civic journalism that could reconnect millions of disaffected voters with the vital issues of the day — thus fulfilling the public service requirements that stuck us with the dull, old news format in the first place.

**Mindbending.** What about using cutting-edge technology to help solve our problem? We could pioneer "Subliminal Broadcasting" with a sub rosa news program that would run simultaneously with a popular show superimposed "on top" of it. The genius of this approach is that it allows us to transmit uninteresting but important public affairs material without driving the public to jazzier competitors. The subliminal report would educate the voter on an *unconscious level* with split-second bursts of political information that could not be detected by the naked eye.

As we work out the bugs, we should consider some less ambitious head-

hunting. Could you feature a start-up CBS cable channel for insomniacs? With them we could turn the weakness of this year's political news into a strength. Campaign coverage, including detailed analysis of the candidates' tax and trade policies and extensive excerpts from their speeches, would be played all night on our new channel. Our promo campaign would encourage insomnia sufferers to put a TV in their bedroom and keep it tuned to the channel as they climb between the sheets. The sufferers would be all but guaranteed to nod off quickly for a good night's slumber, without the harmful side effects of barbiturates. They would awake not only more refreshed but better informed. We could call the new channel **CBS Snooze**. There is, of course, a precedent for this sleep-channel idea — C-SPAN. But unlike it, ours will consult experts on sleep and sleep learning, and will thus be more deliberately, scientifically, and effectively soporific. That's our selling point. Still, we don't have Brian Lamb. Let's ink that baby! ■

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# The Risks and Rewards Of Celebrity Tragedy Coverage



BY ANDREW KOHUT

Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for The People & The Press, is a regular CJR columnist, writing about public attitudes toward the media. In 1989 he founded Princeton Survey Research Associates, an attitude and opinion research firm specializing in media, politics, and public policy studies.

This spring, when much of the national news media had become all Elián, all the time, their audience was very familiar. Fully 61 percent of the core audience for the Elián González story were the same dedicated viewers, readers, and listeners who followed news of the plane crash last

July that killed John F. Kennedy Jr. The links don't stop there. No less than 73 percent of those drawn to news about Kennedy's tragic death had been close observers of news about the untimely death of another, even more famous member of the glitterati, Princess Diana.

The core audiences for each of these stories had previously made up a large majority of the those following the O.J. Simpson murder case. And large percentages of each had also closely followed the ins and outs of the only White House scandal to ever improve a president's approval rating. Elián González is a bit of an anomaly here, but when the national spotlight is turned on children in trouble, they quickly become celebrities.

The Pew Research Center's monthly news interest surveys have found that the seemingly disparate accounts of deaths of the rich and famous, a custody battle over a six-year-old boy, a murder trial of a football legend, and a lurid tale of sex in the Oval Office can attract a large common news audience.

A recent national poll found 33 percent of news consumers saying they had followed three or more of these stories very closely. These celebrity tragedy fans can make the ratings move from a 2 to a 4 on cable news shows, or add 300,000 to newsstand magazine sales.

Celebrity tragedy fans are distinguished by two characteristics—they follow news about most things more than the average, but they also are people with decidedly tabloid tastes.

They are much more likely than the average person to watch *America's Most Wanted* and to read *People* and the *National Enquirer*. But they are also heavy users of harder news media.

Demographically, the celebrity tragedy audience contains a disproportionate number of females and less-educated people, compared to general audiences. More people over thirty and members of minority groups also turn up in this category than do younger people and whites. This group also holds generally positive attitudes toward the news. Unlike many Americans, they enjoy keeping up with the news a great deal and are very satisfied with the available choice of TV news programs. Most say they follow national news even when "not much is happening."

The problem with all of this is that a significant portion of the general news audience believes that these celebrity tragedies are over-covered, according to a number of Pew surveys conducted during these media frenzies. News organizations should be particularly concerned with the

reactions of the many loyal news consumers who don't wallow in the celebrity tragedies. The Pew survey identified a bloc comprising about 25 percent of the public who are dutiful news consumers, but are not turned on by national melodramas.

This more serious segment of the audience is better educated, and is generally much less content with the news media's offerings than those fixated on celebrity tragedies. Just 37 percent of the serious news consumers are very satisfied with TV news, compared to 59 percent of the celebrity tragedy fans.

When news organizations go all Elián, all the time, they risk their hold on the serious news audience. And these are the kind of people who have shown a willingness to defect from TV news to the Internet, where they can filter out the latest news on Diana or O.J.

Cable chat shows, which attract a high percentage of news junkies, and pure tabloid media have little to lose by gearing coverage to the celebrity tragedy audience. But that approach is more problematic for news organizations that are also attempting to appeal to more serious consumers. Newspaper editors and nightly news producers might well come away with a hangover if they overdo it on the next Elián or O.J. ■

## CELEBRITY TRAGEDIES: OVERLAPPING AUDIENCES

PERCENTAGE OF THOSE WHO CLOSELY FOLLOWED...

	O.J. Simpson	Princess Diana	Clinton Lewinsky	JFK Jr.	Elián
<b>TOTAL AUDIENCE</b>					
%	%	%	%	%	%
37 O.J. Simpson	—	59	75	64	59
41 Princess Diana	66	—	73	73	65
31 Clinton/Lewinsky	62	55	—	59	55
38 JFK Jr.	66	67	72	—	61
31 Elián	49	49	54	50	—

# In the Kingdom of Imus, The Courtiers Are Quiet



BY PHILIP NOBILE

Philip Nobile, a former media critic for *New York* magazine, is the author of the "Imus Watch" on TomPaine.com.

There is a Gentleman's Agreement among elite journalists in the Boston-Washington corridor regarding morning radio man Don Imus. Mike Wallace exposed Imus's casual use of the word "nigger" in a tough profile on *60 Minutes* back in 1997 (Wallace

confronted Imus with an ex-producer who quoted Imus as saying he had hired a particular staff member "to do nigger jokes." Imus said the conversation had been "off-the-record.") Lars-Erik Nelson disclosed Imus's smear against Gwen Ifill in his column in the *New York Daily News* in 1998 ("Isn't the *Times* wonderful," Nelson quotes Imus as saying, circa 1995, "It lets the cleaning lady cover the White House.")

Yet despite a history of anti-black and anti-gay comments (recent samples are documented on the "Imus Watch" on TomPaine.com), Imus retains the loyalty of a number of renowned journalists. Regular guests include Tom Brokaw, Dan Rather, Jeff Greenfield, Jim Lehrer, Frank Rich, Cokie Roberts, Anna Quindlen, and Tim Russert. Most of these people talk news and politics when they go on *Imus in the Morning*, cleanly separated from banter that falls below the line of decency.

Russert is a special case. His deal with Imus goes beyond strategic silence to occasional collaboration. On April 4, for example, the moderator of *Meet the Press* and Washington bureau chief of NBC News engaged in a dialogue that began with a homage to Russert's spouse, Maureen Orth, a writer with *Vanity Fair*:

**Imus:** Maureen Orth is a journalist — we met her a long, long time ago — I think she was writing for *Newsweek*, an enormously talented

woman and she wrote this book on Andrew Cunanan. What was that book called? ... What was it called, Tim?

**Russert:** *Vulgar Favors*.

**Imus:** Which troubled us in that she had to immerse herself ...

**Russert:** In a culture you know well. (laughter)

Hardcore heteros might not immediately grasp the conceptual lisp in this exchange, but it's there: Imus said that he was "troubled" by research on homosexuality and Russert suggested that Imus is a closet case himself. What's so awful about that? Consider the context: gay people do not fare well on Imus's air, where they can be called "queers," "faggots," "lesbos," "carpetmunchers," and so forth. In one nine-day stretch in February, Imus and his presumably straight crew made snide gay-smacking remarks about Rex Reed, Kevin Spacey, George Michael, Ricky Martin, Carl Lewis, Pedro Martinez, Abner Louima, Tiger Woods, a local weatherman, a member of the BackStreet Boys, and a commentator at the Westminster Dog Show. In the atmosphere of *Imus in the Morning*, Russert's kidding was the equivalent of sharing a watermelon joke with David Duke.

You do not have to be Andrew Sullivan to perceive the odor of what happened next. Minutes after Russert's appearance, the show played a depraved promo constructed out of two spliced-together snippets of the show from the summer of 1998, when Andrew Cunanan was still on the loose following a string of murders of homosexuals. One sound bite involved Imus's brother Fred, who regularly phones in. The second highlighted Orth, another kiddie of the Wilde side:

**Charles McCord** [reading the news]: Authorities say that tips on Andrew Cunanan's whereabouts lead them to believe he is still in the South Florida area. Cunanan is suspected in killing of designer Gianni Versace on Tuesday.

**Fred Imus:** Why are they bothering to catch this guy? He's just whacking off freaks.

**Don Imus:** Shut up. Be quiet. God Almighty.

**F. Imus:** I think the FBI should back off.

**D. Imus:** Just shut up.

**Voice imitating General George Patton:** If your radio sounds funny in the morning, you're listening to *Imus in the Morning*.

**Imus:** Maureen Orth. Good morning, Miss Orth.

**Orth:** Not good, Don.

**Imus:** Why?

**Orth:** Because I'm down here in Miami with Andrew Cunanan and I'm afraid you may be next. [laughter] Just think of it. He goes after old, rich, closeted queens. [laughter]

Bad enough that Imus broadcast his brother's death joke once (and spare us the fake recoil), but to reprise it and call it "funny" in a commercial is an indecency akin to the Greaseman's career-ending wisecrack apropos the truck-dragging death of James Byrd Jr.

The show's comments about black athletes come close. Obviously, Imus's white press entourage prefers the blessing of Imus to solidarity with Ifill and other black journalists — Ed Bradley (*60 Minutes*), Les Payne (*Newsday*), Jack E. White (*Time*), Derrick Z. Jackson (*Boston Globe*), Stanley Crouch (*New York Daily News*), and Ishmael Reed (*Salon*) — whose distaste is on the record.

To paraphrase Jefferson, when I think of the Gentleman's Agreement regarding Imus, I tremble for my profession. ■

# BOOKS

## Through the Grapevine

BY ANDIE TUCHER

Yes, of course, any review in the gossip genre will inevitably contain the phrase "guilty pleasure," and yes, of course, there is some of that in *Dish*. So let's get that over with at the top. I acknowledge, frankly and heartily, that I was delighted to learn Donald Trump once phoned a *People* reporter himself, identified himself as a "John Miller" who was helping Trump with p.r., and fed the fascinated scribe a long yarn about all the female celebrities who were calling and pestering the poor mogul in the hopes of dating him. I was also enchanted to read that the résumé of the *New York Post's* Cindy Adams includes a long list of 1940s-era beauty titles ranging from Miss Coaxial Cable to Miss Bazooka Bubble Gum.

### DISH: THE INSIDE STORY ON THE WORLD OF GOSSIP

BY JEANNETTE WALLS.  
AVON BOOKS. 376 PP. \$25

But silly stories about silly people are one thing, and a hefty book like this, with its thirty-one pages of notes and sources, its chapters devoted to Roone Arledge as well as to Donald Trump, and its general air of seriousness, is quite another.

In fact, dear reader, this is, instead, metagossip. *Dish*, by MSNBC's gossip columnist, does indeed give you the "inside story" on how the world of gossip and tabloid news works, but it does so by indulging in some of the tabloids'



*"It's the Miami 'Herald.' They saw you go in the front door yesterday, but they haven't seen you come out."*

own shabbiest tactics to make its points. And the main point, apparently, is that serious news and tabloid news (or gossip — often Walls seems to consider them one and the same) have grown more and more alike over the years, which is dangerous, trivializing, and insulting — to the tabloids.

That's not how it was in the good old days. Back in the 1930s and '40s, gossip got the respect it deserved. Walls's first fifty-odd pages sometimes read like a paean to those palmy days when ur-gossipmonger Walter Winchell "was said to be, outside politics and religion, the most powerful man in the world." When gossip columnists were "valued by their papers," when they were "loved and even respected by the public," when they numbered "among the best read and most influential journalists in the country."

The mainstream media, however, have been hornin' in on the tabs' turf ever since, and they've made a mess of everything. Mixed in with dishy chapters

zines at least "had pretenses of journalistic integrity and concern for the good of society." The O.J. story made "tabloid values, tabloid techniques, and tabloid standards . . . become the values, techniques, and standards accepted by the mainstream media."

There is, of course, a lot of truth, though not much news, in Walls's argument that many respectable news organizations often embrace tabloid values. But in her effort to *make* this news, she doesn't scruple to bend, even to break the truth. Deconstruct her exposés of the mainstream uses of tabloid tactics, and you'll find the tabloid columnist using tabloid tactics to make her exposé of mainstream media look mainstream. It's either a fiendishly clever postmodern conceit or the unutterably depressing failure of a writer who consistently refers to gossip columnists as "journalists" (all except for Miss Coaxial Cable, who "wasn't really a journalist — she was a character" — *whew!*) to see any remaining differences at all between

on Gene Pope's *National Enquirer*, the Elvis industry, and the junket racket are breathless exposés of all those hypocritical "mainstream" institutions that denounce the tabloids even as they use their tactics. *60 Minutes* demonstrated "how television adopted the techniques pioneered by the *Enquirer*." The hiring of Geraldo Rivera made ABC News "an aggressive pioneer in the tabloidization of network news." Tina Brown's *Vanity Fair* single-handedly destroyed the idea that mainstream maga-

www.msnbc.com/news/gossip and, say, *The New York Times*.

Those tabloid tactics include:

**The write-around.** This is the practice of publishing a story "done without the cooperation of the subject," clearly a trick frowned upon in Gossipworld. *People's* write-around on Goldie Hawn "infuriated" her publicist, the powerful Pat Kingsley, who blasted the magazine for "'subterfuge' and 'misrepresentation' by using quotes that had appeared elsewhere."

Now I certainly wouldn't accuse Walls herself of subterfuge. The careful reader will notice she never actually claims to have interviewed Matt Drudge, Anthony Pellicano, Rona Barrett, Liz Smith, Carol Burnett, Steve Dunleavy, or many of the other celebrities so lavishly quoted in her chapters. And the scrupulous reader is free to turn to the source notes in the back and discover the long lists of articles, books, and broadcasts Walls does cite instead. The fanatically meticulous reader with access to Nexis could even search out and find the "elsewhere" where most of those quotes did appear, some of them years ago. "Subterfuge" — no, not exactly.

**The anonymous source.** When Fox Butterfield of *The New York Times* uses them in his story about the woman who accused William Kennedy Smith of rape, he's operating "in true tabloid fashion." That must be why Walls's source notes include references to "interviews with a number of people who work for [Mike Wallace], many of whom asked not to be identified." And "interviews with current and former *National Enquirer* employees who wish to remain anonymous." And "interviews with current and former employees of ABC, including Barbara Walters . . . and others who wished to remain anonymous." And "a number of former staffers [of *Vanity Fair* who] spoke on the condition of anonymity." And so on.

**The innuendo and the half-truth.** For innuendo, one example of many will suffice — the gratuitous resurrection of Dorothy Dandridge's humiliation at the libel trial of the sleazy keyhole magazine *Confidential* in 1957. Walls casually describes the magazine's charges that "the elegantly beautiful" black singer/actress had had a passionate outdoor encounter with a bandleader at a Lake Tahoe resort, and then moves on to Clark Gable's affairs. What Walls

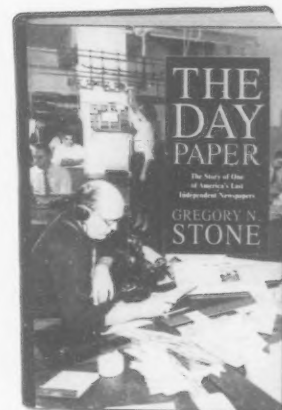
doesn't say is that Dandridge refuted the story in terms that are as poignant today as they must have been convincing to 1957 readers. The singer pointed out that she couldn't even have gone walking in public with a white man, let alone romping with him. "Lake Tahoe at that time was very prejudiced," she told the court. "Negroes were not permitted that freedom . . . I couldn't have been seen with Mr. Terry in a prejudiced place like Lake Tahoe."

As for half-truths, again, one example will give the flavor: in her chapter on John F. Kennedy's manipulation of the press, Walls repeats the tale of young Jack's alleged secret first marriage to a Florida socialite that was allegedly annulled and covered up by his furious father, and notes that Seymour Hersh's *The Dark Side of Camelot* "resurrected" the story and "declared it true." Not mentioned: the various reviewers who also looked into the story and declared Hersh wrong.

**T**he book is littered throughout with careless slips: the tobacco whistleblower was Jeffrey Wigand, not Wigland; the late columnist was Sheilah Graham, not Sheila; the surrogate mother was Mary Beth Whitehead, not Mary Joe; the editor Iain Calder did not have a wife of forty-one years when he was only fifty-six years old; and if that poor woman killed over a game of dominoes had really been found "crumbled" on the floor of her mobile home, then I say the *National Enquirer* had every right to make a story of it.

As a dishy book full of gossip about Elvis or The Donald, this could have been an entertaining beach companion. But *Dish*, masquerading as a serious look at what is indeed a serious problem for journalists and their public, undermines any impulse toward reform or even rational discussion with its implicit argument that the tabloid press can't really be so bad because the mainstream press is worse. That kind of argument may be depressingly familiar in public discourse these days (as in "Yeah, but at least when Giuliani committed adultery it was with someone his own age") — but in this case it's worse than specious. It's dishonest. And you can quote me by name. ■

*Andie Tucher is an assistant professor at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.*



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Applications will be considered on a rolling basis until the position is filled. The School seeks to fill the Chair following the 2000 Presidential election, either by January 2001 or August 2001. A baccalaureate degree is required, a master's degree is preferred.

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# Begetting a Book

BY STEVE WEINBERG

Since becoming the author of my first published book in 1978, I have received inquiries more or less weekly from print and broadcast journalists about how to secure a book contract. My callers are certain they have something interesting and important to say that publishers will pay to print. So, they ask, will you help me find a literary agent who will sell my manuscript to a publisher? Or, they ask, will you help me find a publisher directly, leaving the agent (and the agent's 15 percent commission) out of this?

Currently, I am writing my seventh nonfiction book, for my sixth publisher. The callers figure if not-at-all-famous Weinberg in the middle of Missouri, for God's sake, can break through, certainly he can help them do as much.

I always listen, I always try to be polite. In many instances, though, I do not provide the name of my agent or editor; I can tell from the conversation (or from a later scanning of the manuscript) that the callers are unrealistic either about their writing skills, their subject matter, the difficulties of getting published — or all of the above. Sometimes

Ballantine, Simon & Schuster, and Doubleday. She has recently left the publishing side to become a literary agent at The Gernert Company in New York City. Though I have never met Lerner, I feel as if I know her well. Her beautifully written book of observations and advice seems to be coming from a friend.

In the Introduction, Lerner explains how she fell into an editor's role at book publishing houses after a vocationally undirected college career as an English



*"What do you mean, you don't like it? It's the story of mankind."*

major, a job in the library of a New York City investment bank and, finally, a Columbia University MFA program in poetry that led to a publishing house internship, where she found her passion.

At first, Lerner thought writers were exalted beings with life-styles to be envied. She soon learned otherwise, but the truth did not lead to disillusionment. Instead, it led to fascination about which authors made it and which did not. That, in turn, led to the intense quantitative and qualitative study that shines through every chapter of Lerner's book.

"I saw mediocre writers who were brilliant at networking and superb writers who couldn't part with their pages," Lerner says. "Some seemed blessed with the confidence of entitlement, others cursed with paralyzing insecurities. I saw their defenses and fears, their hopes and ambitions. Very soon I was able to recognize which writers would hunker down for the long haul, revising their texts over and over, and which felt that simply pro-

### THE FOREST FOR THE TREES: AN EDITOR'S ADVICE TO WRITERS

BY BETSY LERNER.

RIVERHEAD BOOKS. 287 PP. \$21.95

I do refer callers to my agent or my editor, or to some other, more appropriate, agent or editor. A few of those referrals have had happy endings. Most have not.

After twenty-two years of such time-consuming, no-charge consultations, Betsy Lerner has entered my life via her just-published book. She will be saving me lots of time, and helping most of my callers far more than I can.

Although I try to keep up with the good editors in the book publishing world, I confess that Lerner had escaped my notice during her decade-plus employment at Houghton Mifflin,

ducing a manuscript should be enough to secure a publishing contract."

Ah, the long haul. Most of the journalists who call me have little sense about how different book writing is from newsroom work. In book writing, there is little if any tangible daily gratification. There is no workplace camaraderie. There is also no place to hide mediocrity or failure. Not-so-talented journalists can skate by in newsrooms, where reporter and editor colleagues pick up the slack. No skating by is allowed in book writing; the author is all alone until delivering a book manuscript to an editor like Lerner.

While the first part of Lerner's book is instructive and enjoyable, for the insightful journalist it might also be painful. Its overriding theme is types of writers, with their insecurities on and off the page. Sometimes naming names, more often preserving anonymity, Lerner describes the self-promoter, the natural, the wicked child, the neurotic, and the downright mentally ill. She explains the ambivalence that almost every writer feels about writing for oneself versus writing for the public. Reading Lerner's take on each type, I recognized my writer acquaintances and myself. The recognition was not always pleasant, especially given that I am way overdue on my current book.

Lerner prepared her typology for reasons other than mere curiosity:

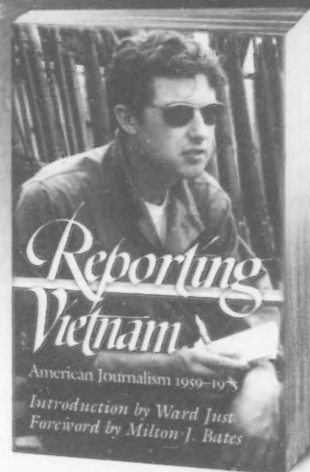
"While editors are most certainly concerned with matters of style, structure, voice and flow, they are often faced with extra-textual problems — keeping the writer motivated, seeing the bigger picture, finding the patterns and rhythms, subtexts and operating metaphors that may elude an author drowning in research or blocked midstream. In the most productive author-editor relationship, the editor, like a good dance partner who neither leads nor follows but anticipates and trusts, can help the writer find her way back into the work, can cajole another revision, contemplate the deeper themes, or supply the seamless transition, the telling detail."

In the second part of the book, Lerner switches the emphasis from analytical to descriptive, as she explains the process of getting published. Lerner concentrates on how agents become involved, how authors deal with rejection, what editors are looking for from authors, what authors are looking for from editors, the way a book comes together step by step after a contract is signed, and either the

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letdown (normal) or the euphoria (abnormal) after it is on sale.

Lerner's goal in the second part is "to give a feeling of what it's like to sit behind an editor's desk and read hundreds of manuscripts, of how an editor feels when she is either supported or thwarted in her efforts to acquire a project, or when a favorite author's book is universally panned or worse, ignored." She succeeds.

Journalists hoping to make the passage from newsroom pieces to books, she advises, should refrain from unproductive emulation. "Every writer who proposes a book of oral reportage swears that he's the next Studs Terkel. Those

who want to describe a year in the life assure you that they are the next Tracy Kidder . . . Every feminist tract is the next *Backlash* [by Susan Faludi]." Be yourself, Lerner instructs. After all, Terkel, Kidder, and Faludi were all unpublished authors at one point.

Part of the emulation disease comes from trying to outsmart the market. Forget about that, Lerner says. Journalists should choose book projects that they are passionate about, that take everything they've got. Using journalist Jonathan Harr as an example, Lerner says when he started to research *A Civil Action*, "it's likely that more than a few people tried to discourage

him. Who wants to read about kids who die of leukemia? Who wants to read about toxic poisoning? . . . The success of Harr's book pays tribute to an author going for broke and writing his book with as much integrity and grit as a person can muster."

Granted, most nonfiction books, even those as good as *A Civil Action*, sell poorly, and hardly ever become Hollywood films starring John Travolta. If the long odds are discouraging to you, don't bother.

Because Lerner understands the long odds, she usually refrains from overly inspirational passages. Underneath it all, however, her book is quite likely to be inspirational for journalists who already have the fire to do a book.

It would be pleasing if I could quote passage after passage verbatim, because every chapter is filled with covertly inspirational examples. My remaining space permits just one, however. I chose it because it expresses so well what I emphasize to my callers over and over — writing a book is not primarily about making money or achieving fame. Rather, writing a book is about passion. I want to give Lerner the last words:

"Some of the most striking and successful books . . . were clearly born of a writer's obsession and complete disregard for what, supposedly, sells. Few editors would have gone for a queer book about a little-known murder in Savannah that took its sweet time describing every other quirk of the city and its inhabitants before addressing the crime. Whatever John Berendt was thinking when he set out to write *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, it couldn't have been the bestseller list . . . Clearly, he was born to write this book, and he worked through whatever ambivalence and uncertainty he might have felt within himself or encountered from others.

"Most writers have very little choice in what they write about. Think of any writer's body of work, and you will see the thematic pattern incorporating voice, structure, and intent. What is in evidence over and over is a certain set of obsessions, a certain vocabulary, a way of approaching the page. The person who can't focus is not without his own obsessions, vocabulary, and approach. However, either he can't find his form or he can't apply the necessary discipline that ultimately separates the published from the unpublished." ■

Steve Weinberg, a CJR contributing editor, serves on the National Book Critics Circle board of directors and reviews regularly for a dozen newspapers and magazines. He is currently writing a biography of Ida Tarbell.



Announces

## THE KAISER MEDIA INTERNSHIPS IN URBAN HEALTH REPORTING FOR 2000

### *An internship program for young minority journalists interested in specializing in urban public health reporting*

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation is again sponsoring summer internships, starting June 2000, at eight major metropolitan newspapers and at three local television stations, for young minority journalists interested in reporting on urban public health issues. The interns are selected by the newspapers/TV stations.

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Cheryl Conner - *WAGA-5, Atlanta*  
Shabnam Daneshvar - *The Oregonian\**  
Lilian Liang - *The Sun-Sentinel, Ft. Lauderdale*  
Vicky Nguyen - *KTVU-2, San Francisco-Oakland*  
Catherine Pascual - *The Los Angeles Times*  
Megan Scott - *The Boston Globe*  
Sherice Shields - *USA Today*  
Grace Tsai - *KDFW-4, Dallas*  
Nicole Wong - *The San Jose Mercury News*

\* *The Oregonian* is helping sponsor a Kaiser intern for the 2000 program.

The Kaiser Internship Program provides an initial week-long briefing on urban public health issues and health reporting at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Interns are then based for ten weeks at their newspaper/TV station, typically under the direction of the Health or Metro Editor/News Director, where they report on health issues. The program ends with a 3-day meeting and site visits in Boston. Interns receive a 12-week stipend and travel expenses. The aim is to provide young journalists or journalism college graduates with an in-depth introduction to and practical experience on the specialist health beat. For details on the year 2001 program, check our website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org); to apply, write to:

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Executive Director of the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program  
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# BOOK REPORTS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

## COVERING IOWA: THE HISTORY OF THE DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE COMPANY 1849-1985

By William B. Friedrichs  
Iowa State University Press.  
307 pp. \$49.95

In sub-zero dawns in the 1940s, I delivered the *Des Moines Register* to dozens of subscribers on the south side of my hometown, a town more than 120 miles from Des Moines. At mid-century, the morning *Register* or the evening *Tribune* went every day to half the households in a state of 2 million plus, roughly 300 miles across, a perhaps unique circulation achievement. (Moreover, the *Register* almost always had the area's high-school scores from the previous night.) This history of the newspapers by William B. Friedrichs, an historian at Simpson College (not far south of Des Moines), relates how the *Register* and *Tribune*, under the guidance of Gardner Cowles and his descendants, spread across the state and maintained its dominance through most of the twentieth century — and how, inevitably, things fell apart and the paper became another link in the Gannett chain. The history is based to a great degree on revenue and circulation statistics, with adequate attention to the *Register's* Republican-liberal editorial policies. But Friedrichs has no feeling for the newsroom, and his account of just how the *Register* covered Iowa is skimpy. For some of that story, one can still turn to the ingratiating memoir by George Mills about the publisher and his first star editor, *Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr.* (1977).

## AN AMERICAN ALBUM: ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF HARPER'S MAGAZINE

Edited by Lewis H. Lapham and Ellen Rosenbush.  
Franklin Square Press. 712 pp. \$50

**H**arper's and *The New York Times* are about the same age, and in fact had the same first editor, Henry J. Raymond. Created by publishing's Harper brothers in 1850, the magazine has appeared at least 1,800 times since; this anthology is a more than gen-

erous sample of what has been published under its dozen editors (counting the incumbent, Lewis H. Lapham, twice, like Grover Cleveland). In his introduction, Lapham dispassionately tells of the century-plus of Harper ownership, the disastrous Cowles family interregnum, the rescue from extinction by the MacArthur Foundation, and the rebirth of the magazine as a self-sustaining nonprofit entity. Outstanding journalism is scattered throughout, from George F. Noyes's account of Antietam through Seymour Hersh's "My Lai 4," although the yield is thin in the half-century tenure of Henry Mills Alden (1869-1919), who was more inclined to literature. Unfortunately, the individual items are presented devoid of annotation; the reader often wishes for more — both the significance of the selection and the historical perspective.

## THE REMAKING OF AN AMERICAN

By Elizabeth Banks;  
Introduction by Jane S. Gabin.  
University Press of Florida.  
297 pp. \$19.95 paper

**W**ho was Elizabeth Banks? Not easy to find out. She ordered her personal papers destroyed after her death; in her time she was just (barely) famous enough to be listed in the British *Who's Who*. In a forty-page introduction to this memoir, Jane S. Gabin of the University of North Carolina tells what there is to know: Banks was born in New Jersey about 1870, grew up in Wisconsin, went to London in 1893 and spent most of the rest of her life there. She gained recognition doing undercover stories (e.g., posing as a maid) and eventually became the first woman writer on the staff of *Referee*, a magazine of opinion. There, under her best-known pen name, "Enid," she subversively campaigned for woman suffrage without ever seeming to mention the subject. In World War I she was active in Belgian relief. Afterward, she revisited the United States and to a degree regained her pride that she had retained her American citizenship, partly because of her discomfort with England's class-bound society. She published this rambling, engaging memoir — her tone is nervy and unintimidated but not strident — in 1928 and then fell silent in the last ten years of her life.

## COP KNOWLEDGE: POLICE POWER AND CULTURAL NARRATIVE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

By Christopher P. Wilson  
The University of Chicago Press.  
281 pp. \$42; \$16 paper

**A**n alternative title for this work might be: "Cops and Journalists: Made for Each Other." Christopher Wilson of Boston College, previously author of *The Labor of Words*, a fine study of Progressive-era writing, here examines the complex ways in which urban policing and changing media forms have affected each other. He ranges from an 1896 incident in New York's Tenderloin involving Stephen Crane and the arrest of a prostitute, through the *Dragnet* procedural era and tough-guy columnists, the paramilitary policing of the 1960s, and the era of True Crime sensationalism and police tapes. He concludes with a painstaking examination of new-style community policing, focusing on the role of *The Boston Globe* in a local murder case. Instead of being merely another survey of crime news in the media, the study is equally knowledgeable about the waves of reform and regression in American police departments.

## SLANTING THE STORY: THE FORCES THAT SHAPE THE NEWS

By Trudy Lieberman  
The New Press. 208 pp. \$21.95

**T**rudy Lieberman, a contributing editor for *CJR* and director of the Center for Consumer Health Choices at Consumers Union, contends here that, "with help from the mainstream media, right-wing think tanks and organizations have discredited their opponents, moved their ideas to the front of the national agenda, dominated the debate, and engineered big changes in public policy." Her case studies center on conservative efforts to weaken the American Association of Retired Persons, the Food and Drug Administration, Head Start, and Medicare. She concludes that these efforts have been successful, in great part because news stories fail to penetrate beyond the "he said, she said" convention.

*James Boylan is founding editor of CJR and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.*

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# The Lower case

## Rudy has a kiss for woman Donna says ruined marriage

### King of Prussia man found dead

Police believe the well-armed survivalist killed himself before setting his apartment on fire. B1

*The Philadelphia Inquirer* 4/27/00

### Indian Accuses Pakistan of Hijacking Ties

*The Washington Post* 1/3/00



CORBIS SYGMA/MICHAEL HENRIKSEN

*New York Post* 5/23/00

## Game farmers trying to get chronic wasting disease before special session

*Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune* 5/5/00

## Community meets to discuss violence at town hall meeting

*The Dragon Chronicle News*  
(State University of New York College at Cortland) 4/19/00

## Teen: He denies using racial epithaphs

*Quad-City Times* (Davenport, Iowa) 5/11/00

## Sidewalk eats star in Slope

*The Brooklyn (N.Y.) Paper* 5/29/00

**SEVEN LAWYERS HAVE** rescued themselves from the legal panel considering possible sanctions against President Clinton for lying under oath during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

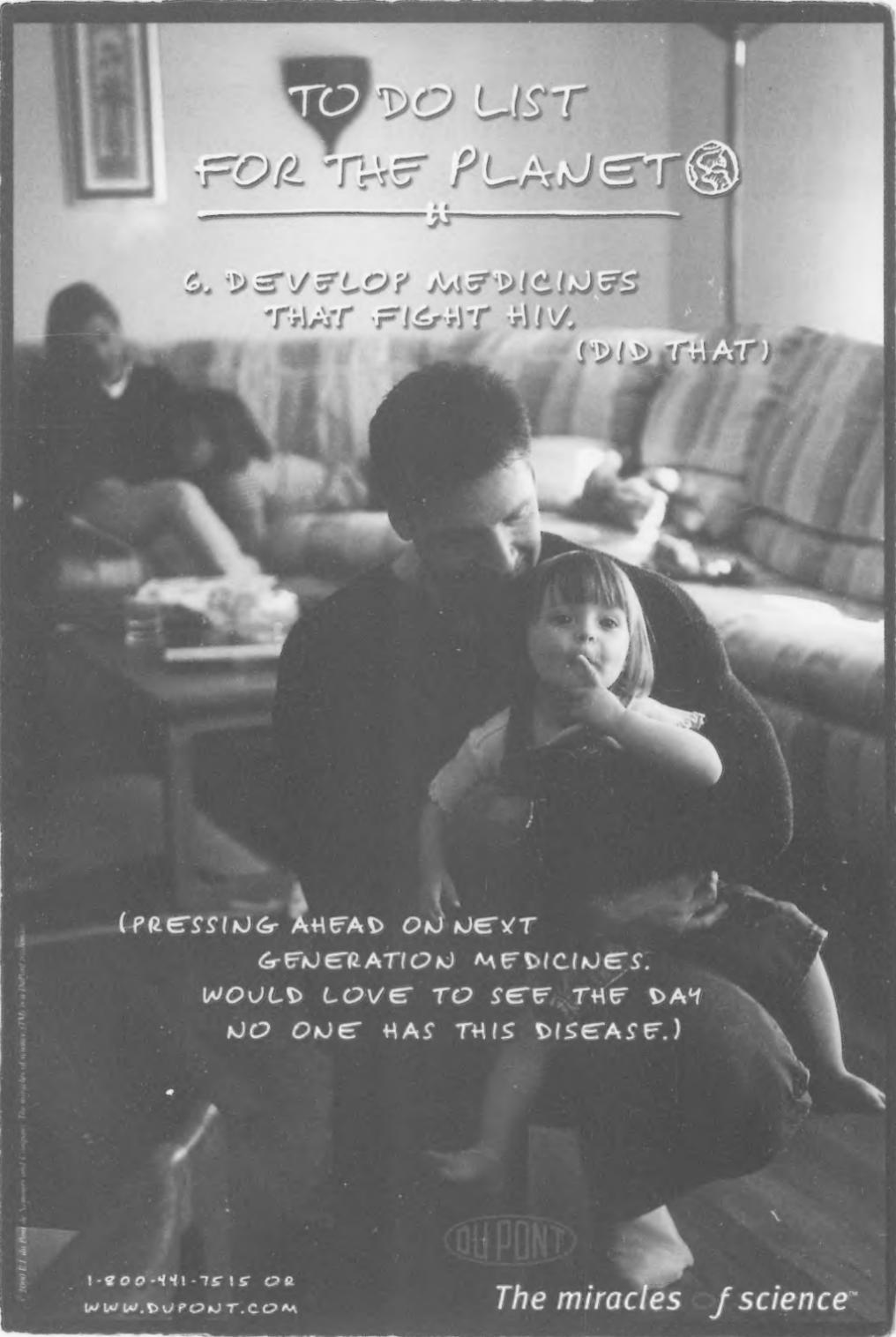
*Delaware State News* (Dover, Del.) 5/19/00

## Practice of dying requires perfecting

*Waterbury (Conn.) Republican-American* 5/10/00

## Teens dispense sex, health advice to peers

*The Times* (Trenton, N.J.) 4/8/00



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